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AUTHOR OF

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GRANTLEY GRANGE:

BENEDICTS AND BACHELORS.

BY

SHELSLEY BEAUCHAMP,

AUTHOR OF "NELLY HAMILTON," ETC.

[Bradley, T. Waldron]

"An early worshipper at Nature's shrine,
I loved her rudest scenes—warrens and heaths,
And yellow commons, and birch-shaded hollows,
And hedgerows bordering unfrequented lanes."

C. SMITH.

NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1879.

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H. L. Paul

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GRANTLEY GRANGE.



CHAPTER I.

JOHN ARCHER OF GRANTLEY GRANGE.

“WELL, John, old fellow, I see you are still amongst the good-looking ones! You have a rare brown horse there,” said Wells, as his friend Archer, who had come swinging along on the hand-gallop from Grantley Grange, drew rein and came up the hollow-way, that was deep down under the terrace-wall, where Wells stood by the holly-hocks.

It was Royston Rookery that he came to, where Wells lived; an old-fashioned Manor-house in the Teme Valley, that was well situated in the midst of hop-yards and orchards, half-way down a slope that looked to the river and the fishing-fords. And it belonged to Wells, and it was a good sort of place to live at; for it was a picturesque old house, of irregular height, and roomy; half-timbered and patterned with ovals and circles and cross-bars, and heavy with ivy; and it had some big bay windows and a jutting porch, and clustered chimneys—twisted—and tall vanes. It was under a rookery too, and by a moat; and there was a breadth of lawn and a sweep of shrubbery, and iron gates that led into a tangled garden.

Corn-fields were about it, and meadows below it; and high hills were at the back of it, that were wooded to the top of them. And “the blow” there was as good as a sea blow, for you had a sweep of seventy miles of country for the looking for it—from the Welsh mountains to the Cotswolds; and there was such a fluttering of pigeons and a cawing of rooks and a cackling of fowls, and so many other sounds about the buildings, that there seemed to be

a good deal of busy life there; and the neighing of colts and the clatter of hoofs told that the owner of it was a horseman.

And as Archer, having ridden round to the front, jumped off at the porch, that was bright with roses and red autumn berries, Wells came across the lawn and met him.

"He is a fine-topped horse too, John," said he, "and a stepper. How are you? A new one, is he not? where did you pick him up?"

"May had him for a customer," said Archer; "but as the horse seemed a likely one, and they did not deal, I bought him. How do you like him?"

"His colour is good," said Wells.

"Yes, it is," said Archer; "a good and lasting one. Look at his mousey flank and tan-touched muzzle. He is a beauty!"

"He moves well, John."

"He has pace too, Harry, and can fence a bit. Throw your leg over him and feel his mouth. How are the colts?"

"Oh, flourishing! They are all together now; ride down and see them."

"Well, jump up, then, and give me your opinion just what you think of him."

So Archer turned the horse round, and Harry mounted: and then they went through a gorsed hollow-way down into the meadows to see the colts—five of them—and the brood mares that were with them; and they found them standing together there by some shedding, that was gorsed and wattled, and fronted south, serving for both shade and shelter.

And past the shed was a brook—a trout stream—that came down through the woods to the river; and there were some hurdles on the other side of it, and bushed bars beyond them, and a flight of rails with a gate in the middle of it, up under the hedgerow at the top, put there for jumping practice, as Wells rode his horses there in the summer to get them clever at their fences, and so make them into money in the hunting season.

"Well," said Wells, as he handled the horse like a workman, "I like his move, John, and his action; he does not ride amiss by any means. What shall I put him at?"

"Just what you please," replied Archer. "Give him the hurdles, and then try the gorse."

So, crossing the brook at the roadway, Wells laid hold of him, and rushing him at the hurdles, the horse topped them cleverly; and taking the bars in his stride, jumped them like a greyhound!

Wells then turned his round, and rode him gently down towards the water, caught his head short as he got near it, and sent him at it. Answering the call, the brown horse cleared it with lengthy bound, and landed splendidly, dropping at once into a steady canter, which, changing to a gallop at a touch, he raced him down to where the brook was wider—an open unbushy place higher up the meadow—when, without swerve or balk, he fled it famously, and dropped into his pace again just like a hunter.

"A water-jumper, John, and no mistake!" said Harry, as he came up, patting him. "How well he goes! Will Stevens and the gray will have a rival."

"I hope so," returned Archer; "but take him on and put him over a good fence or two; you will not part company, I can assure you."

"Oh, never mind; I see he knows his business. What are you up to?" said Wells, seeing that his friend was busy with his pencil.

"Just marking-in the forms of this old oak," said Archer, "as we are here. I have it on the canvas, with those two mares in shade and the rest in front, full in the sunlight. But those boughs yonder I shall lengthen, to throw some of the youngsters in half-shadow. I think they'll group the better for it, Harry."

"You are very good, John. When shall you finish it?"

"Oh, soon," said Archer; "the first time I can get a working fit."

"Thanks," Wells said; "I shall prize it. I mean to hang it in the dining-room; there is a good light there. You should most certainly have been an artist; you would have been R.A. by now, old fellow!"

"No doubt," said Archer, "if R.A. signified just 'ruggling at it,' and selling 'pot-boilers' for a pound apiece. Paint if you like, Harry, for a bit of pastime—I know you do a little in that way, just now and then—

that's very well; but as for a living, why, it means starvation."

"Our stout-built friend, old Johnson," Wells said, "looks like starving, does he not?—strong as a horse, and at least six feet in height, and with as nice a place as man need live in."

"Yes; but as a rule you will, though, find it true; unless a man is born with talent in him, or he has the interest of good friends to aid him. Now, Johnson is a genius," Archer said, as all acknowledge, and he has good friends, too, who can always aid him. However, Harry, as my share chanced to be the 'silver spoon,' so I can work or play; though were it otherwise, I should be less lazy. But, unfortunately, as you know, my dear fellow, money is 'the root of all evil,' as our school-copy read when we were juveniles."

"And the source of any quantity of good," was the reply. "If you should have a surplus," Wells said, "hand it over. I know the good of it, and I will chance 'the evil.'"

Ten years ago these men left school together when they were twenty-one—for lads remained there in those days till the nonsense was knocked out of them, and they were fit to face the world—Wells coming home to assist his father at the farm, and Archer going to learn the law in London.

And as Wells was fond of farming, and always put his shoulder to the wheel like a man who meant it, he was able, when his old father died six years later, to take the management of the farm for his mother, who, with her two daughters, continued to live with him.

After a time both sisters married, and settled within a few miles of each other, some distance up the valley. The mother then rented a cottage to be near them; so his aunt, Mrs. Cooper, her sister, came to keep house for him—he remaining a bachelor.

But Archer, who was living in London, artied to an old uncle in Carey Street, was too fond of the country to take readily to a town life, and he soon tired of it; the sooner, perhaps, because he knew that in all probability he should never be obliged to practise the law as a profession; and the time therefore with him passed drearily, so that he never heard from his friend Wells without longing to be back again in the old country.

But with the greenery of Lincoln's Inn and Gray's Inn, and the musical tinkle of the fountain in the Temple, he did at length manage most days, while summer lasted, to get some slight set-off against the hard, high stool, the drudgery of office, and the endless survey of bricks and mortar.

For he had only to evade the vigilance of Mr. Kewtye—the “managing man,” when his uncle was away—to be in a few minutes over the roar of Fleet Street, and safe in the solitude of the Temple Gardens, where, in his loved surroundings of rustling leaves and falling water, sweeps of greensward and a moving river, with tall trees like the old tall trees “at home,” he, in the quiet of the dear old place, would, with his well-thumbed “Tennyson” for company, forget the details of the law and its belongings.

And when he turned homewards in the evenings, he would go up through the Green Park, and wait for the jingle of the four-in-hands as he loitered in Rotten Row, and watched the riders there, and coveted their horses for a gallop. And he would linger long at the rails there until Royalty came by; that, as a low murmur ran along them and hats were raised, he might catch a glimpse of that sweet pale face with the kindly smile, that, if it but bent towards him, sent him on his way all the happier under the old trees where the rooks were cawing, while settling in the twilight in their places; that straightway turned his thoughts to sounds near home—sounds that he liked and used to listen to at Royston Rookery along with Wells, when the evening shadows purpled out and faded under that hill-side many a mile away.

But his best days were Saturdays; for those were “red-letter” ones, and given to the river or South Kensington—forgetting at the latter all the world amongst the pictures; and thence for Bayswater across “the Gardens,” over the lengthened shadows of the elms—his pipe his company. He had his picture-windows too, just like a child, and “did” them regularly; and when his uncle sent him west on business, he would get across to Christie's and M'Lean's, and come back wild about some “grand old Cox,” or Hulme, or Gilbert, Cattermole or Frith.

His route to Carey Street being Covent Garden, he would bargain with the old women at the stalls for homely garden flowers and common ferns. He always had fresh

flowers and some birds. A dog he could not keep, or he would have had one; but as he fraternised with Dick, the cat, a fine black fellow who sat purring by him, he soon made up for it, for they became great friends.

His Sundays too were pleasurable; for if not booked for dinner at his uncle's, he would start betimes for some far village church; and after service—simple and earnest there like that “at home”—dine at some road-side inn, and then turn out in loving search of heaths, by-lanes, and commons, or wherever else he might find birds or flowers, or anything that seemed to look “like home.”

But even with all these set-offs, his office duties were the direst drudgery, and he found himself quite unable to settle down to the daily routine required of him. For being a true lover of nature, and therefore of the country, and endowed with a poetic temperament and great enthusiasm, no wonder that at times—away from his loved woods and hills, and all their greenery—he should so dearly long for his own apple-orchards and the cowslip-meadows, the bluebell-hedgerows and the primrose-copses, and the nightingale-lanes that were hawthorn-hidden, “at the old home in Worcestershire.”

And his most joyous of all evenings—those at the Academy—helped this feeling, when in the glad hours he so often spent there—and they were indeed very happy ones—he saw but the pictures, not the people; and longed to be away with Cole in the corn-fields, or with Leader on the hills, or up amongst the Welsh mountains and with Syer for company.

And autumn came again, his second autumn; and the play of light ceased amongst the leaves, and there was no longer on the sanded walk a moving flicker of red-gold and purple. And dead leaves fell in the fountain, and the old garden-seat in the Temple was littered with them; and blue mists crept along the grass, and damps came up from the river; and Archer perforce became more learned in the law.

Then fogs came on; not the thin white fogs of home, that, though they grayed the hills, yet showed the woods through, but thick ones—dense ones, ten times worse than last year—fogs he could almost eat; that shrouded him in their yellowness, and bumped him badly, hiding the folks he met, and bothering him. And drivers harassed him

with shouts, and cabs worried him with shaves, and boys so maddened him with cries, that he felt, if it continued much longer, he must kick somebody.

For his evening walks home over the soft green turf where the sheep were, and with the rooks and the song-birds for company, had been obliged to be given up—as the days got shorter—and exchanged for a stuffy omnibus at the Turnstile; that, as it was always filled quite full with steaming City men, bound like himself for Bayswater, and grumbling at the weather and the funds, did not mend matters or temper.

But the fogs got thicker, and the horses fell; and passengers got out and walked, and growled at being morning after morning so late at office. And sleet began to drive, and snow to fall; and then the climax came, for dirt and mud and slush were everywhere; that made his thoughts turn still more to the country, where he knew there would be snow, but white and glittering—ay, white for miles; and the ground crisp, and the ice thick, and not like that in the parks—unsafe and rotten.

The rabbiting and the ratting too would be remembered, round by the orchard hedgerows and the ricks, with that varmint, Tanner, and that cute old Bobby, the two dogs—Archer's chums; and Jerry would be thought of, the stout cob that he had to ride, and who had carried him so well with the hounds in the holidays, and who would "lead over" a fence, when the drop on the north side was a frosty one, or the hog-backed stile looked "nasty." So it very soon came about that London was spoken of disrespectfully, Carey Street condemned, and the law books one and all anathematised.

And as time went on, the craving for the country that John Archer had, intensified; and the hard high stool seemed harder, and dreary days still drearier; when—all at once as it seemed—they ceased to use gas in the office, for the days were longer, and light till "leaving time."

Then shadows fell from houses on the road; for bursts of sunshine came, that filled the Kentish lanes with primroses, and brought the flower-girls, who plagued him constantly with them and violets, just as they seemed to do twelve months ago. That time was bad enough, but he got over it; but now, do what he would, it would bring back to mind each nook in all those dear old lanes "at

home," where all spring wild-flowers grew. He dodged the fern-men every time he saw them, and crossed the street at every flower-girl, and shirked his one pet place of Covent Garden.

But it was all in vain, however, for he got worse, and even passed the black man without giving, and the old crooning woman who so "God blessed" him. And then, unable to put up with it any longer—for he found punching the boy and scoring his pad furiously did him no manner of good—he plainly told his uncle he would have no more of it "there"—law or no law.

So, rushing off to Bayswater, and bidding his artist-friends good-bye, he packed his traps in the morning, and caught the ten train at Paddington; his old chum, Johnson, with whom he lived, seeing "the last of him." Of course there was a row when he did get home, but he did not mind it; for once at the Grange, he said he should stay there.

And he did stay there; for his father dying soon afterwards—in the following spring, killed by a fall while hunting—he came into possession; when, getting his younger brother to see to the estate, and remain with his sister—his mother being dead—he joined Johnson and some artists in a sketching tour, that included a six months' sojourn in Rome.

With a love for "common objects," and with an eye for colour, he always seemed to see a beauty in everything, and he would often amuse his more prosaic friends on his return home by his glowing description of scenes and scenery that they had themselves wholly ignored, or had in part passed over—so much did he appreciate that joy of colour, that harmony of form, and that all-pervading presence of the beautiful, that, so thoroughly "felt" by artists, seems sometimes strange to others.

And so, with his yearning for the country satisfied, he at length settled down to lead the life of a country gentleman; his brother Edward taking the management of the estate, and being well paid for his stewardship; and he, John Archer, spending his time now at home, now with his acquaintances—a wide circle of hunting and artist friends. In the winter he stayed some time at Hazelwood, where Brandon, one of his tenants, lived—a very pretty place lower down the valley—as it was handier for the

hunting of that portion. And in the summer, when he got away for a few weeks to have a run round amongst his old friends, he made Town bearable by devoting the greater portion of his time there to the Academy, and to the studios of the men he knew.

And now that he was just commencing his sixth season with hounds, and had promised his friend Burton of Boscobel to come out in scarlet—to “don the pink”—Charlie being, according to his own showing, a shy youth, and in want of some one to bear him company and go shares in “lighting up the landscape,” he, Archer, had ridden up to Wells, who lived on the Herefordshire side of the river, ten miles distant from the Grange, to see about some hay and oats, and to show him his new horse and to have a gossip; and also to have another look at the mares and colts, before putting in the finishing touches to the picture he was painting.

CHAPTER II.

ROYSTON ROOKERY—THE DAWN OF DAY.

“THERE, then, Harry,” said Archer, as he finished sketching the oak, and proceeded to touch in some portions of the shed under it, as Wells sat on the brown horse and watched him; “I think that will do. There is first-rate colour on that old gnarled trunk. Look at those grays,” said he, “and browns; those tender greens and nice cool neutral tints. I certainly must try if I can get them, and that old thatch. Where those boughs bend I think I will put some pigeons—some white ones. They would come in well above that chestnut colt.”

“They would,” said Wells.

“How well that old tree branches, does it not?” said Archer. “The way those boughs give off is most artistic; though, were Charlie Burton here, he would see “a tree,”—just that and only that, like the famed primrose on the river’s brim,—and miss all that sweet colour most completely, and all those forms and branchings I have sketched. A melancholy case, I call it, Harry—untutored vision.

“Now, that is where I gain, and where he loses. It is

strange, too," said Archer; "for when we have been in town during the season, and have gone together to the Academy, I have several times been quite delighted to see him, when there, positively pleased at some poor transcript of a scene he knew; and yet that same scene, as painted all by Nature, would be passed repeatedly by him—ay, quite unnoticed. So with the multitude! The highest praise, you very often find, is lavished on some painty-looking picture—Nature at second hand, inferior to her—that fails most utterly in the original to gain one word. Is it not strange?"

"It is," said Wells. "I cannot understand it; for though not versed in art, I do see colour."

"I often think how much is missed," said Archer, "through that same want of sight. Now, Charlie, I dare say, most days rides round the farm; and through the lanes and the woods, and along the hills, and so back home by the river; and yet, as I know, all he sees—or perhaps, for the matter of that, five hundred others—is land, trees, water! Well, I go, we say, the same round, and I see fine colour, and light and shade in every combination, and changing tints, the same as you might do, and groups and forms, too, that are picturesque, and make material for artists' bits—'pictures,' in short, unframed, but nature-painted; the grand originals man never equalled! Who has the best ride, think you, he or I?"

"That is just where I gain when I am hunting: where others find but sport, I find enjoyment. I like the sport, but I also love the country; and so," said Archer, "instead of limiting the pleasure that I have to just the run, my pleasure, hunting days, includes it all—the ride to hounds, and that back home again. What their eyes miss, mine see; that's just about it. A blessed faculty, and thank God for it! Now, then, I am with you, Harry," said Archer, as he pocketed the sketch.

"Well, jump up, then," said Wells, "and ride him, John. We will go up to the house."

"No," he replied; "you keep your sitting, man; I'll walk. If you have luck, those colts will make some money."

"This brown horse, too," Wells said; "or I am mistaken. He will keep a place, you'll see, when hunting comes."

"He has already done so," was the reply, "and a good place too."

"He has! Where, when?—not since you bought him, John?"

"Yes, since," said Archer; "last week a time or two, and twice before. I had him out, too, yesterday, cub-hunting."

"So soon?" said Wells.

"Most of the grain is in," said Archer, "where our hounds draw. They are sooner there than we are in the valley."

"Well, you are early, John."

"I like to be. The first day's cubbing, Harry, I turn out with the hounds, and I make most days with them all through the season."

"You get your money's worth, old boy, I think."

"I do; if we have an early autumn and a latish spring, and are not laid by through frost. The two months' start I get, I would not miss. The woodlands here are fine, but fancy up there in a nice October!"

"Grand, I should say," said Wells, as he rode forward and opened the gate for Archer. "Well, here we are, then, John," said he, dismounting. "Quiet, Countess, down; don't you be troublesome. Ross," said Wells, "put her in a while, and see to this horse. Let him have some chilled water, and make him comfortable."

"Yes, sir," said the groom, touching his hat as he spoke. "Here's Miles waiting to see you, sir."

"Well, my man, what is it?" said Wells to an old fellow who was standing by the stables, and who had edged away as the horse went in.

"Ax yur pardin, sur, fur disturbin' on ye," said the fellow, as he pulled his forelock, "but a waants a noaate, if a ma be so bould, fur poor Took fur the doctur. The relavin' offisur dunna come till Toosday, sur, and as ye be Gardin o' the parish, it 'ood saaive 'em waaitin' loike."

"What is the matter with him?" said Wells.

"A dunna neow disakly, sur," was the reply, "but I apprehends as it's summut i' his innards, or his yud. He took bad i' the harvist, sur, a week agoo—the sun come on him, sur, most onaccountably—and he arn't been well roight since."

"Yes, I heard of it," said Wells; "but I thought he was better."

"I were a-washin' o' ma' 'ands, sur, at woame, as I'd collied wi' the tay-kittle—my woife, sur—that be Mary Moiles, as chars fur ye a' toimes, sur, an' thank ye fur it; bein' out a-lazin', sur, wi' the wimmen folk i' the whate-fields—when theer come a tabber at the doore, an' in strays Hopcutt, the cow-leech, sur, as cured 'Blossom,' an' maade forty on 'em to the paail agen; bless their pratty 'arts, they be faamous milkers! So 'John,' says I—I calls him John, sur—'you bin a-drinkin';' an' I bats him on his yud, playful-loike, wi' ma hat, 'cos he'd got a squilt o' his nose, sur, as showed the drink. 'Don't be lungeous, Moiles,' says he, 'Took's off his yud.' 'Lord bless me!' says I; 'John, sit thee down.' So he sot down; an' then he up and teld ma, sur, as how he'd met the poor soul a-tryin' to get through a gat i' the hedge in a unkid sort o' a waay, as though he were moithered loike; an' a-pearin' arter his buttty, as he said had fettled his horses and sooped 'em oop, and had left him wi' a bigger load than he could well heft—it were ony some broken bits o' hetherins though, for his kittle. So says Hopcutt, 'Thinkin',' says he, 'to turn his thoughts a bit and cheer him up, poore wretch, I says, 'The crops ha' bin koindish-like, Tom'—Tom's his first naame, sur—'fur theer be a dollup o' whate about this turn.' 'Ay,' says he, a-pickin' at his cooat, quaire and daffty-loike, 'I conna mend it, the thread fazles so.' 'Then odds it,' says Hopcutt. But he couldna maake much on him, sur; so he saw him saafe at woame—he lives theer anant the church, sur—and then he comed on to ma to get ma see fur the doctur; and so, sur, I comed to you."

"Well, come into the kitchen," said Wells, "and sit you down a bit."

"Much obleeged, sur, that's sure," said the fellow. "A drap o' port winde-and-waater now moight do him a power o' good, p'raps, poor, wretch! They saay it be mighty strengthnin'!"

"Well, when the doctor thinks it proper for him," said Wells, "if you will come up, he shall have some; and anything else that is fit for him."

"Thank you koindly, sur; it 'ood ba welcome to him."

"Now, John," said Wells, "come in. What will you have, old fellow?"

"Oh, nothing, thank you, Harry," said Archer. "A Worcestershire youth that, evidently," said he.

"Yes," replied Wells; "but with a cross of Staffordshire in him. His mother was a Dudley woman—'hurcoom'd fro' Doodley 'ood soide,' as he says—and it makes him fond of the O. Well, now, what will you have? After a good ten-miles' ride I'm sure you must want something, John," said Wells. "Come, what is it to be?"

"Just one drop of barland, then, Harry, for a quencher. It is good, I know, and will not hurt a body."

"Made with the nut-mill, John, and pure pear-juice. Excuse me just a moment. Here, Mary," said he, as he made out an order for the doctor, "just give that note to Miles, and let him have some bread-and-cheese and cider; then draw some perry, and bring us both a crust in."

"How is your aunt?" said Archer.

"Oh, thanks, she is tidy-like," said Wells. "She is gone up to the common with some things for a youngster who is ill at one of our cottages. There is a good deal of illness round about here. The doctor, they say, is busy."

"The wind you always get on these hills," said Archer, "ought, though, one would think, to blow it clear away."

"The fall of the leaf, John; I suppose that's it. What have you got this season?"

"Four, and 'fit;' the bay and gray that I rode up to April, and this new brown horse that you seem to fancy, and that one at the farm at Hazelwood, that golden bay. I always go there," Archer said, "for some time in the season, and stay with my tenant there; you know him—Brandon. How are you off for hay now? Have you any old?"

"Only a rick or two," said Wells; "not much to spare. What, are you out then?"

"I have plenty of new left," was the reply, "but not much old; and Brandon, too, is short; so I wish you would let me have two tons or so."

"When shall you want it?" said Wells; "this week or the next? Now help yourself, John. You have seen to Miles, Mary?"

"I have, sir," said the girl.

"Thanks, Harry," said Archer.

"Oh, next week will do, if that is right for you."

"Yes, that will suit me very well," said Wells; "we go for coal this week."

"What is it now?" said Archer.

"Well, four at market, but three pounds ten to you. Oats?"

"Yes; I could do with some, if they are not too light. What price?"

"They are making three-and-six, but three to you. They are bright and full, and weigh well. How many shall I send you?"

"Say sixty bushels."

"How is the perry, John?"

"Oh, very good," said Archer. "What a fine colour it is!"

"Yes," said Wells; "it was all picked fruit. Good healthy drink, John, and beats all your spirits."

"Spirits? I should think it does, indeed," said Archer. "The vilest things a man can ever take to; they make men beasts, and ten times worse than beasts; and they cause more crime and misery than all else. But it is no matter, Harry, what it is, ale, wine, or spirits, a drunken fellow is to me disgusting; to sit and sot until his brains are gone, it's horrid! If men would only quench their thirst and stop, how much this world of ours would be the gainer!"

"It would," Wells said; "that's certain, John."

"Have you much cider fruit, Harry?"

"Well, rather thin," said Wells; "but lots of perry-pears and table-fruit."

"Were you at market Saturday? I did not see you?"

"Yes, I was," said he; "but I only just rode in, John, to see some people, and left directly. Wheat was a trifle better, and so were oats."

"Have you seen the otter yet?"

"No," said Harry; "but we tracked him, under the osier-bed there by the river. His holt is there, I think. I like those otter-hounds, they are so musical."

"So musical! So melancholy, eh?" said Archer.

"Have you engaged your pickers?"

"Yes, for Tuesday week. I shall have this time, I think, about seventy, with neighbours. The crop is light, so it won't be long about."

"The better chance for price, old man; they'll fetch the more."

"They might perhaps, John, as they are bad in Kent. That's good for us."

"Is your old drier, Nathan Styles, still with you?"

"Yes," said Wells; "but I fear for the last time. His asthma kills him. Where were you yesterday?"

"Oh, out by Pirton," said Archer. "There is a strongish litter there; and so we had a merry rattler with the cubs, and killed."

"It was a splendid morning for you," said Wells.

"Yes, delightful; and we both enjoyed the ride there immensely. Charlie Burton came in over night to see me on some business, and so he stayed, to make sure of being up in time, and joined us. He has a rare mare this time, Harry, and means to cut us down, the lot of us."

"Is Parker back?" said Wells.

"No, not yet; he is out with Miller. They mean to pick up Collins on the way. He started off with Johnson and a block, with great ideas of doing wondrous sketches; but he left it for the hammer and the box, and took to plants and stones. Hardy is back, and Lee; they are up in town."

"Hammond, I think," Wells said, "is still there, is he not?"

"Yes," said Archer. "I have to write to him soon, by the bye. I promised I would go with him to Richmond, but by mistake I fixed a hunting day, the eighth, and there is a meet then that I would not miss for anything. Dick Gale is with him. They have a place at Brompton, and ride together each day in the park for constitutional. I mean to try persuasion when I do write, touching the pleasure of a day with hounds, to see if they will join some Hunt or other. With means like theirs, they ought to drop a fiver, and mount the pink at once, and go like men. The Row, to my mind, Harry, is, I think, so tame! Just as an exercising ground it is well enough, to show your horses and to show yourself, and to advertise your tailor; but it will not, like fox-hunting, make men manly, that you know, Harry; though many an hour," said Archer, "have I sat and watched them there, and longed for a gallop, when mooning home with Carey Street behind me. If that wretched old Kewtye ever found the blotting-pads, he would see his own phiz there some hundred times."

"Is your uncle all right now?" said Wells.

"Oh, yes; he is civil enough," was the reply; "but he was crusty for two or three years. You see, he did not like me giving him the slip; but the fact is, Harry, I got home-sick, and I was bound to do it; and I am heartily glad that I did leave the law behind me."

"You would have been too honest for a lawyer, John," said Wells.

"Don't abuse the profession," replied Archer, "or I will charge you six-and-eightpence for advice. All men must live. Your doctor gets a guinea at a gulp, but your poor lawyer lets you have three nibbles at him for the same!"

"Yes," said Wells; "and when he can't keep you nibbling any longer, he swallows you up bodily, and it's all over with you!"

"Ah, well," said Archer, "there are necessary evils in this world, John."

"Yes, gradational," was the reply; "and I know one of the worst," said Wells.

"Be quiet," said Archer. "Why don't you go cubbing?"

"I cannot spare the time, my dear fellow," said Wells, "or I should like it well enough. I don't," said he, "see much of them till close to Christmas. You like cubbing?"

"I do," said Archer. "With but a small 'field,' and few out, we are quiet, and free from that constant hallooing and noise, and all that aimless galloping that leads to the hounds being maimed and yourself cannoned by some random rider, who, once he is outside a horse, thinks he has hands, and is, of course, a horseman. Before the fences thin you have some chance; but when daylight breaks through them, to aid the cautious ones, then you have half the tailors in the country with you to override the hounds and make a noise. You often see men out, as you know, Harry, not hold of reins, but hanging to them for their very life, thinking if they have but their feet in the stirrups up to the hilt, after the manner of them, they are safe while leather lasts."

"You get the freshness of the morning, John. I think myself that is so very jolly! I am always up at four," said Wells, "and out at five, and so I know it."

"You are!" said Archer.

"Yes; at six we breakfast, and at nine have lunch, twelve dinner—just one hour to it. Come, help yourself," said Wells.

"I wish I could turn out," said Archer; "but it is only on hunting mornings that I am up so early; just while the cubbing is about, or the fixtures are distant, and now and then in the summer, when I am at Hazelwood; but then, as you say, it is indeed very jolly. So fragrant, cool, and still; with scarcely a sound, but the singing of the song-birds or the ripple of a brook: and every bit of turf dew-wet and sparkling. I like to see the game, too, about the fields and the spinnies; the coveys and the pheasants, and the rabbits and the hares, that come out in the white fog that hangs on the meadows to feed with the Herefords. You seem well off for game up here?"

"Too many rabbits, John; for they play the deuce with that wheat by the wood."

"Yes," said Archer; "I saw, as I rode up, that you have a strip off there as if it were mown."

"Oh, yes, the wretches! Down in the hop-yard hedges and the orchards we do keep them under pretty well," said Wells; "but in the covers we cannot touch them; not, however, till the people at the Hall have shot there; and by that time the keepers have generally contrived to put them in their pockets. The deuce is in the rabbits, I think, John. I like them in the larder well enough; they are good in any form; but on the land they are awful nuisances. You'll stay, of course," said Wells, "and take pot-luck with us?"

"If really pot-luck, John, I will," said Archer.

"Well, drink your perry then, and let's turn out, and we'll look round the things, and give the dogs a run."

"That's right," said Archer; "I should like to do so. I see you have had some fresh white-faces—some Herefords—since I was here."

"Yes," replied Wells, "and they look kind too. Have you Tanner with you, John, and old Bobby now?"

"Yes," said Archer, "and as big a scamp as ever, is old Bobby?"

"Now, then, you dogs!" cried Wells. "Hi! Tip and Pepper! We will go out this way, John, to stop Countess barking; for though Ross has shut her in the stable, she would hear us, and then the old lady would want to join

us; and those dogs are awfully jealous of her because I notice her. Ah, here you are, you rascals! Come along," said Wells, as Tip and Pepper came to them, bounding and barking.

So they went off with the dogs, and saw the stock and things, and the loose boxes, and the cart stables, and had a turn about the grounds till dinner.

And after dinner they both went out again, and strolled about the garden and the terrace, and gossipped with the old fellow there who was trimming the cut yews, and who had worked "on the place, sir, man and boy, a matter o' sixty year, come Candlemas," and who was still "heart-well." And then, as Harry would insist on dusting out the arbour in the hollies—"just for a bit of a smoke, you know, for company"—they sat there; with the wooded hills before them, and the hop-yards and the orchards below them, that sloped to the meadows in the flat, that were dotted with the cattle, and willowed by the river. And it was very pleasant there; for the light breeze that was blowing brought them the cry of the ringdoves, and the white weir at the mill sent its murmur up to them.

And Tip, who was on the scamp as usual, went off hunting in the shrubbery; but Pepper, who was lazily inclined, lay by the old sun-dial, with his head between his paws, blinking at the pigeons on the lawn; that were pluming their snowy feathers, and cooing there by the ruined fountain, that made such a pleasant splashing sound, as its jet, still there, fell on the lilies in the basin. And the lazy old dog would keep dropping asleep and dreaming, to wake and whimper, and so startle the pigeons, and make them fly up to the ivied barn, to flutter down again when he settled, and strut about him.

And Wells and Archer chatted together there for some time about horses and hops, and stock and crops and markets, and then of hounds and hunting, and the early fixtures; when, "John," said Harry, "how about the run? You said you would tell me all about it after dinner, and what you and Charlie did amongst the cubs. Pirton I think you met at, did you not?"

"Yes," said Archer; "Pirton Spinnies. They are beyond the church, near the farm where you bought that bay cob. They are snug and quiet, with famous lying, and

with lots of feg; and being down in a dip, are just the very places for a good litter."

"You must have started early," said Wells, "for that quarter?"

"We did," said Archer; "soon after four, for the fixture was at six."

"I wish I had been with you."

"I wish you had," said Archer. "Friend Charlie was delighted with the ride."

"A novelty to him, John, to see the day break."

"Yes, it was, indeed; but he thoroughly enjoyed it, though he did rub his eyes when he started."

"I think," said Archer, "those early morning skies are beautiful, when they loose daylight in! I like to see them as they flash the daffodil, that ripples through the gray and breaks it up; and see the forms it makes, that blend together and then shape to clouds—rose, dun, and violet—and each one underlit!"

"We watched it as we rode, trembling along the sky from east to west—you, earliest of birds, must see it frequently—and we saw the blue come in, and noticed how it crept along and widened, and scattered all the clouds to little bits, gold-edged; that, as broad daylight came, vanished to vapour in a sky all blue! I only wish that I could see it oftener; I envy all who can get up so early."

"We reached the spinnies as the clock struck six," said Archer, "and found the pack there, with George and Dick the whips, and Will Warne the huntsman, and the Red-Coat Runner, who was by Will's white horse, playing with the hounds. And we were soon joined by a score or so of others, well mounted, but in the rough, as we were also; and then the Master came."

"Kerrison?" said Wells.

"Yes, Sir Charles," said Archer; "he has been Master, as you know, for very many years, and has always been popular. 'Good-morning, gentlemen,' he said, as he rode up with some friends, and lifted his hat to the lot of us, and looking as young as ever, though he must be getting on a bit. 'I am glad to meet you. We are just a handful I see, and so right in number for a good rattling spirt along the meadows. Now, Warne,' said he, 'let's put the youngsters in; it is six o'clock, time's up! To give the cubs a chance, we will draw "down wind."'"

CHAPTER III.

OUT WITH THE CUBS, AND A KISS IN THE HOP-YARD.

"You found, of course," said Wells. "I know the fixture; it is safe for a litter, and a certain find."

"We did," was the reply; "for before the hounds had been ten minutes in, leaves rustled and sticks cracked, and then there was music! And as the old hounds," said Archer, "dashed merrily along through the fern and bracken, the youngsters faced the briers pluckily, not shirking them as they did at first, when it was all new to them and their hides were tender, but tearing away through them like good ones, and as wild as wolves."

"I suppose they are good hounds, are they not?" said Wells, "They had some of them here 'at walk' at Nelson's farm, and also at the Hollies, and they seemed good hounds to me; I often saw them."

"I think they will make good hounds," said Archer. "Old Charlie was delighted with them when with me yesterday. 'What a lot of resolute young beggars these hounds are!' said he. 'The way they searched that underwood, and plunged into the thickest of the cover, was splendid. Scratches won't cow them, I can see; they're game, and rare good plucked ones, and they will soon face gorse.'"

"We found that the one we had up was the vixen; so the hounds were stopped," said Archer, "and turned again to cover, when very soon the whole place seemed alive, for we had the lot up—every cub a-foot. But as one of them chanced to meet a hound, and stopped to wonder at the strange encounter, he got quite bewildered, and the hounds were on to him; for others seeing him, they settled to him, and so he bolted."

"Charlie and I," said Archer, "were waiting in the meadow keeping a good look-out, when, as we heard the hounds running in the cover, we saw the cub come scrambling down the bank through the briers, and three hounds after him, almost at his brush, that neither of us had much time to move, as the rest of the pack came leaping through, close to them. Luckily, however, our horses

were quiet, and they behaved well, though the hounds were tumbling against their legs and giving tongue lustily. We did not stir, of course," said he, "until they were all clear; but then we made play up the meadows, where the pace was so sharp that we almost feared they would 'chop' him. The cub, though, held his own for several fields, when, thinking perhaps that he would be safer with his mother, he turned," said Archer, "to try to get back into the cover, but meeting the hounds, it was soon all over with him; his days were ended!"

"Poor little beast!" said Wells.

"I don't myself like killing cubs," said Archer; "but what are you to do? You cannot help it. A fierce old dog-fox always dies so game, that with the excitement pity is stamped out: but those soft, woolly, flocky little dogs have all such winsome ways, and look so sharp with their bright beady eyes when they are at play—I have often watched them—that if they could be spared, I should be glad. However, as I know, Harry, that can never be, I will not get sentimental on the matter; for though it is not like your 'fixture' hunting, still what we get is good, and I would not miss it. It also is, as you know, very useful in making horses clever at their fences, and quietly behaved, too, with the hounds. Besides," said he, "there is so much to see in our fine woodland country in the autumn, when every hedgerow tree is flushed with colour, that sympathy with cubs is not obtrusive; yet thinking of them makes you pity them, if only that they are young."

"You see," said Harry, pointing to the woods, "that yew-tree yonder, just up the gully, where the wood dips down? Well, in the sandstone rock there, there's a litter. I went up there the other night with Mann the keeper, who showed them to me. But the vixen winded us, though we were hidden; and so she turned and laid her rabbit down under a bush, and slinked away into the brush and stayed there, and would not show again. The cubs, though, came out as the moon rose, and played and rolled about, ay, just like kittens."

"They are very pretty," said Wells, "and were their scent less strong, they would do for pets, for ladies' muffs."

"They are jolly little things, certainly," said Archer.

"Well, after we had killed the cub, we went back again to the cover, to try if we could bolt another; and they were soon on the move again. But they would not bolt, and we had nothing but up and down work and round and round, the pack dividing. At last, by dodging, Will got the hounds to settle to the one he thought was the strongest of the lot, and they soon forced him out through the fence at the upper end and along the banks, he holding them in check, so as to give the cub a start.

"We soon," said Archer, "found that he was a game one, for he went straight and well, and things looked promising, and as if we should have a good gallop by the river. But after we had raced him for five or six fields, that had each of them tidy fences, and at one of which," said Archer, "your friend Simkins got a fall, he turned for a dingle that was handy; but failing to hang there, he made off up the country, as if he knew there were some big woods beyond it; and then some of the fellows began larking."

"You get pretty well of that, no doubt," said Wells.

"Yes," replied Archer, "always in the cubbing, and rather too much of it. Tom Harber was one of them. He backed his horse against the miller's—Ben Branson, who was out—to fairly follow hounds, and to take all fences, no gates allowed; Charlie and I to see that neither shirked. So putting the steam on," said he, "away they went, as if they had tops and cords on in the season.

"The betting at first," said Archer, "was even by the 'field,' then five to three was laid against the miller, whose horse, had up from grass, that good red roan, broke into heats, and so brushed half his fences. Tom picked his up at every place he came to—he is a neatish fencer, as you know—and chaffed the miller, who quite good-humouredly joined in the laugh we had, although it was against him, and still kept on. A check, though it was but a short one, put matters right, however, for the roan went better when the hounds hit off again.

"We were now getting to some stiff enclosures," continued Archer, "and so we betted on the pair for the first fall. The miller tried it, but his horse recovered; when Tom, who fancied he could cut him down and stop him, spurred his black mare—that blood, hot-tempered one that broke the hurdles."

"I know," said Wells; "a wild one."

"Well, that soon made her fractious; so, getting the bit in her teeth, she took her fences racing, when, catching some stiff rails, he got a cropper; the miller clearing them as Tom lay under.

"'First fall to Harber!' said Ben, as he went on laughing, and raced for the next fence, and went over it.

"'Look out, old fellow,' said Tom, as he picked himself up and mounted, 'I shall be bound to catch you yet!'"

"What fun!" said Wells. "I wish I had been with you."

"Then they both went at it as if they meant it; Charlie and I," said Archer, "riding all the while well alongside them to keep score, the cub still in wind and the hounds going fairly, when the miller fell a whacker!

"'A fall in flour!' cried Tom; and then he fell too.

"'And better times, my boys; a fall in meat!' cried Ben, as he mounted again and rode off like a good one, before the grazier could get in the saddle again, and shouted at the next fence, 'State of market: hops, gentlemen, you see, are somewhat lower,' as Pearce, the buyer, who was chaffing Ben, caught some big sticks and purred."

"He would leave his mark," said Wells; "for he is no feather-weight. Just stop a minute, John; who is that man down the bank yonder? He is on a bay there, looking at the hops. Oh, I see; it is the new tenant up the hill. Ah, you may look, my man, but they beat yours. Yes, John."

"Well, while all this larking was going on," said Archer, "the youngsters took their share with the old ones, and went well, and hunted fairly every yard of ground. As the cub was a strong one, and gave us a good gallop, we each thought we were in for a smart run; but all at once we heard a noise of singing and laughing. So Charlie cried—

"'Push on, miller, and stick to him, grazier; and ware hops, mind, when we get in the rows! We are near a hop-yard, for I hear the pickers. It is all but over; for if he ventures there his fate is sealed, they will soon settle him!'"

"It was early, too, for picking," said Harry. "They have none of them commenced this side the water."

"I thought so too; but it was true, sure enough," said Archer, "for as we turned round a corner, there they were, down in a hop-yard, and all singing merrily. They looked so picturesque," said he, "grouped or scattered about as they were, and making bright bits of colour all about there; with wreaths of blue smoke floating to the woods from their fires. It was quite a bit for Johnson."

"The right one, too, to render it," said Harry. "He painted some of our lot once," said he, "and did them famously; so true and natural. Hop scenes are too often but fancy pictures, as you know, John; and all those unstudied attitudes of rustic beauty that you meet with altogether ignored for show and prettiness and posings; elegant maybe," said he, "but wrong, as they of course clash with all surroundings, and destroy the very character of such scenes. And you see the same thing in glean-ing and haymaking pictures; how clean and neatly dressed, and what a town look they make the figures have! It is wrong, of course."

"Yes," Archer said, "and comes of studio-painting, and working more from models than from nature. I hold with models, though, for single figures, and also to correct form; and they are often necessary to work in detail in your out-door studies; but where there are many figures, as in hay and harvest fields, attitudes and groupings, to be truthful, must be marked-in carefully on the spot, and with all those lights and shadows well made out that show the time of day and where the sun is. A practised hand, perhaps, may mask a studio bit by piecing it together cleverly; but nine times out of ten," said Archer, "you may tell it, either by fancy work or some queer fancy sky badly thought out, and at variance with the shadows."

"You very often see it on the walls," said Wells, "in lots of galleries."

"You do," said Archer, "and, much to my surprise, it passes muster."

"Well, to return to the hounds, Harry," resumed Archer. "They had crossed a lane as we caught sight of the pickers, and were now slanting over a grass patch, and making for the hop-yard; and they all went right into it, as we watched them. And then 'from scent to view' was but the work of a moment; for the people shouted and commenced running, up and across and in and out the

alleys, as if they wanted to catch the cub themselves. So poor pug was soon settled—they mobbed him! For as we cantered up along the adland an old hound fastened, and the youngsters had him; the miller tearing in with waving hat, and cry of ‘Kill to me, you two—one fall to spare!’ as Harber showed at the bottom of the rows. Of course the place was all alive by then; for each had so much to say, and all were talking.”

“A pity too,” said Harry, “that they ‘chopped’ him.

“Here’s Benson’s man,” said he. “What does he want, I wonder? Excuse me, John.”

“His master has some beans to sell,” said Wells, returning. “He says, will I ride round and see them, they are worth the money. So I will go up to-morrow, John. If they suit, it will save me going to town; and if not, I will meet you at the Fox on Saturday. Do you know whose hops those were where you killed the cub?”

“The name was Mowbray,” said Archer.

“Ah, Mowbray of the Green,” replied Wells.

“He seems, I think, a very decent fellow; he made us all go up,” said Archer, “and did us well.”

“He has some early sorts,” Wells said, “that ripen quickly. I heard that he would pick a week before us. How did they look?”

“Oh, fairish to my thinking. I asked the man who cut them; he said, ‘Well.’ But were Charlie here, he could tell you more about them; they cribbed him!”

“They did? Well, that is good!” said Harry, laughing; “I am very glad they had him. How did they manage it?”

“Well, in this way,” said Archer: “when he dismounted he gave a man his mare to move about, and then he strolled amongst the pickers for a chat, while the hounds rested, as all the people went to work again as soon as the scurry was over.”

“Women or girls?” said Wells.

“A few of them were women, but the greater part of them,” said Archer, “were tall, well-grown, saucy-looking girls, with sunburnt faces, who swarmed round him as he got amongst them, and cried,

“‘Come, I say, you, sir, just you pay your footing; it’s a rule, you know; so if you don’t hand out, we’ll all soon crib you!’”

“‘What’s that?’ said Charlie. ‘What do you mean by that?’ making believe he did not know a bit.

“‘Why, kiss and tumble you, and that right well, and soon, the lot of us; as you will see, unless you tip us just to drink your health. You will now, won’t you? Do, there’s a darling!’ said one girl coaxingly, with a meaning look, that seemed to us to be brimful of mischief.”

“I missed that lot,” said Wells.

“You did,” said Archer; “but Charlie boy, who rather likes a frolic, said, ‘No, I won’t; I would sooner stand the kissing;’ thinking she did not mean it, though she said it. ‘So now then, girls, come on! Come, who’s the first?’”

“That’s just like him!” said Wells.

“‘Why, you,’ she cried, and gave his lips a smacker! ‘So in you go, young man, head over heels. Now kiss him, girls,’ said she, ‘as if you loved him. You don’t get such a young man every day!’ And with a jerk she fairly tipped him over, down into a crib that was half filled with hops, and close beside them.”

“Poor Charlie!” said Wells.

“So there they held him,” said Archer, “laughing as he fought, till each—near fifty of them—had bent down and kissed him! And that so furiously, they stopped his breath.”

“That’s good!” said Wells.

“When just as he began to beg for mercy, the farmer came across, with whip in hand, and cried, ‘Just stop that, will you, you young hussies? Confound your bodies! How often have I said I won’t allow it, you fast young pieces? Just help him out at once, and make him tidy, or else I’ll stop your apples when you go, you cheeky varmint!’ So they very soon had him out,” said Archer.

“What,” said Wells, “did Charlie say to it?”

“Oh, only laughed,” said Archer; “though the hops had stained him finely.

“‘A rule, they say,’ said he. ‘Oh, never mind them. Here, lassies, is some silver for you. Now be off,’ said Charlie, as he wiped his coat with his handkerchief, and pitched a couple of half-crowns to them; that brought several of them on their knees, all of a heap together, upsetting a crib as they scrambled for it.

“‘And here’s, then, one for me, you nice young man.

I likes the look o' you; you're nice, you are!' cried one great girl, who kissed him, and then scampered."

"What fun!" said Harry. "How did you come off?"

"Why, took the hint," said Archer, "and tipped them, and so I escaped. We chaffed old Charlie pretty well about it; but he vowed we were only jealous of his luck in getting such a lot of kisses without the asking.

"As all were now on the move up to the house, with Will and the whips and the farmer, and the rest of them, we followed," said Archer, "with Sir Charles, who had stayed along with his friends to see the fun and to treat the pickers.

"'You have a lively lot there, Mowbray,' said he, as we overtook them. 'I thought our friend, Mr. Burton here, would have been kissed to death. I do not think they are troubled with much shyness.'

"'Oh, not a bit of it, Sir Charles,' said the farmer; 'they're brazen madams, and quite above my hands, I can assure you. All my work, that it is, to stop 'em prigging, although we give 'em as many apples as they can carry when they go home again after picking's over; besides some of the rosiest from the heaps to thread, and hang in long loops, three deep, round their necks, confound 'em! They go back through the towns, Sir Charles,' said he, 'rigged out that way; with bundles on their heads as full as they can be, and with sprays of hops about 'em, picked from the hedges, or else begged from us, or, just as likely, perhaps taken without With your leave or By your leave; for they're awful imps, are hop girls; awful!'"

"We give ours hops," said Wells, "to stop their stealing."

"And a good plan too," said Archer. "Sir Charles then asked, 'Where do you get them from, Mowbray? They are healthy-looking girls, and bright and clean.'"

"'Most,' said the farmer, 'from the Black Country. A woman finds 'em, and brings 'em here from the pit-banks in a boat, at least half-way, and then they ride or trudge it; or, if our team's at play, we send to "the Port,"' said he, 'to meet 'em. They're black enough at home amongst the cinders, but here they're clean, I will say that for 'em, although they're roughish.

"'You'd see 'em, if you stayed till night, Sir Charles—till seven o'clock—round that long water-trough,' he said, 'as wild as colts, and quite as full of antics; scrubbing

away for life, with all their back-hair down and half undressed, or flinging water, or squatting on the steps there by Nep's kennel—we pen him up, or else he'd nip 'em tight!—to comb their long locks out a bit, and brush 'em tidy; for let who will be by, they're not a bashful lot, that's very certain!

“‘They all sleep there,’ said Mowbray, ‘in the barn; their noise is awful. I often have to crack the whip at night, and sing out, “I’m a-coming!” Then they stop. The only quiet ones we have,’ he said, ‘are neighbours; but they go home.’”

“Something like my lot, John,” said Wells. “Bad is the best. I hope though this time they’ll be rather better.”

“‘Now here we are, gentlemen,’ said Mowbray, as we reached the house,” continued Archer, ‘Come in, please! We have some decent cider, and some perry. Have what you like; you’re welcome. Come here,’ he said, ‘some of you men, and move the horses round, and keep 'em clear of hounds, but don’t you ride 'em. Get some chilled water and some gruel, Tom, and let 'em have it; and, Dick, wipe 'em down a bit, and comb their manes out. Now, gentlemen!’

“‘Thanks, Mowbray,’ said Sir Charles, ‘you’re very good; but we must not trespass too much on your kindness.’

“‘All right, Sir Charles,’ said he; ‘we’ll have 'em seen to, they’ll be the fresher; for it’s a good long way now till you reach the kennels. There’s water handy if the hounds will lap it.’

“So we went into the house,” said Archer; “a large and roomy one, and with a kitchen well hung with hams and sides of bacon; Will and the whips remaining with the hounds, and having their lunch outside on the pitching. The wife, it appeared, was busy in the dairy, butter-making; but the daughters, who seemed to be three nice homely girls, soon made themselves useful, and got a spread for us. A round of beef and a ham, and some nice brown-bread and cheese, and a capital meat-pie, and some chawl, all in a plain way, and so we enjoyed it, as although it was at that time but eight o’clock, we had breakfast at four, and the fresh air since then had given us both an appetite.”

“I think you fell on your feet at the right place,” said Wells.

“I think we did,” said Archer.

CHAPTER IV.

A QUEER CUSTOMER—MORNING IN THE VALLEY.

"YATES," said Wells, calling from the arbour to the old man who was clipping, "don't cut those yews too close; and see that all the loppings are burnt before you go home, or they will be pitched aside somewhere, and settle my cows. Shy a stone at that rascal Tip, will you? he will play the deuce with those hollyhocks. Come here, you sinner," cried Wells, calling to him, "and settle yourself down a bit by old Pepper."

But there was no come back in that dog; for he left the lawn and treed the cat immediately, and made vigorous attempts to get up the ivy and have her in the branches. "What a varmint it is!" said Wells; "he has been coached out of those hollyhocks before to-day. Confound the dog, I don't want him to spoil them!"

"No," said Archer, "they make a nice line of colour along the terrace, and you can see them above the wall as you come up the bank; they come in well between those two wonderful peacocks."

"Ah," said Wells, "those are Yates's handiwork; he is a dab hand at that sort of thing. He wants sadly to get to work at the yews round the moat; he says, 'They'd look mighty fine, master, cushioned and bolstered;' but I tell him, John, they are out of bounds, and look best there as they are."

"So they do, Harry," said Archer, "though here they are right enough and in keeping with the timbered work and the chimneys. "Well," he continued, "as I was saying, we had a good lunch there, and after we had done ample justice to it, we thanked the ladies and our worthy host for their kindness, and mounted to go home, as the pack had started, when a rough-looking fellow in a velveteen jacket, and with a whip in his hand, came up by the fold-yard to the green in the front, and touched his hat to the farmer."

"'It's o' no manner o' use, maister,' said he, going straight into the middle of his grievance; 'I mun gie him up; for a bigger brute I never had to do with. He's snapt the martingale and comed roight over, and thray

times I've slipped him. Try some one else's neck—I dunna moind it; for though he be a good horse, he's a nipper, and never, I think, can be broke o' rearin'.

"Is that all that's the matter with him?" said Charlie.

"That be all, sir," replied the fellow; "and enough too, as I reckon. But p'raps you fancy, young sir," said he to Charlie, "as you can brake? My business I dunnow; oh no, I don't."

"Well, don't get riled, my man, I only spoke; but if your master here will trust me on him, I'll show you," Charlie said, "how you may manage him, and break him of that stupid rearing trick. How have you ridden him," he asked; "with good sharp spurs and snaffle?"

"Sharp spurs and snaffle!" sneered the man; "no spurs and curb. I guessed at once how much you knew about it. If you be foolish enough to try the spurs, young sir, you'll find he'll very soon settle you; for he'll break your neck, as he'd break mine if I was such a born fool as you think I be. Sharp spurs indeed! If you comed out with the cakes, I stopt in till the loaves; I warn't half baked, nor borned yesterday. No, no," said the man, shaking his head, "whatever else he be, Jem baint no fool!"

"The breaker, then, got savage on the matter?" said Wells.

"It seemed so," Archer said.

"Then, said Charles to the farmer, 'if you will risk the horse, I'll risk the neck; and all that I shall want is a snaffle and spurs. No martingale or curb, no stirrups or a whip; merely a snaffle, Mr. Mowbray, and long spurs with sharp rowels in them; mine are blunted. They set one's tops off, but I never use them. I hate a scratched horse,' said Charlie, 'and a horse that needs them. Come here, my boy,' he called out to the youngster, 'and hold my mare a bit.'

"The farmer, I, and all of us," said Archer, "tried hard to turn him, but we could not. We told him," said he, "that he would break his neck, and that it was a foolish thing to meddle with such an animal. But as he seemed so stiff about it, the horse was fetched, and the curb exchanged for a snaffle."

"What sort of a horse was he?" asked Wells; "a Cruiser brute?"

"No, a big good-looking horse," said Archer, "well up to weight, bay, with black points. Taking his own spurs off, he put on a pair they brought him, which," said Archer, "were regular prickers; and he then led the horse down into the straw-yard and mounted him slowly and deliberately, the brute putting back his ears, but standing still. "Then," said Archer, "he slipped the stirrups off and threw them down, so as to be safer if the horse fell over, just felt his mouth, and then—looked out for squalls."

"But he could not stick him in that way," said Wells.

"He could and did," said Archer; "for he has, as you know," said he, "such a splendid grip! I knew him, Harry, lose a stirrup once with hounds, and go on too without it to the finish."

"You did?" said Wells.

"Yes, and the same with girths; a state of things that is just ten times worse," said Archer.

"I should think so indeed," Wells said.

"It was two seasons ago, and they snap right through as he was going over a fence; enough, you'll say, to pitch him on his head. They were some that had been used with a buck-jumper, and so had got stretched and frayed; but for more than twenty minutes, for I saw it," said Archer, "he held a line and kept his place with hounds solely by grip, the saddle never turning or the ends catching, as he did his fences. We had some big things too that day, that took some doing."

"Well," said Harry, "I will give him best, John. I should think he was stiffish the next day."

"No doubt he was," said Archer, "with all his muscles tense; but he would not own it. Well, the first thing that he did was to let the horse walk, and, much to our surprise, he found him steady. Before he had ridden him, however, twice round the yard," said Archer, "he was up in the air in a moment; but just as he seemed like coming backwards—and we looked for Charlie to slip off him—he bounded like a shot and dropped again, through spurs sent home."

"The deuce he did!" said Wells.

"Then he tried the trick again," said Archer, "with the same result; a straight dart forwards, then a snort and stop, pawing with his foreleg and shaking his head,

as if he scarcely knew what to make of it. Each time the horse reared, the spurs were sent in, which made him bound and drop. Then Charlie patted him. In half an hour, with many a shake of head, that horse," said Archer, "walked from the straw-yard to a field, and quietly; and then went round it without once rearing or attempting to, caressed and petted all the way by Charlie, who put him through his paces to a gallop and sat him splendidly, no horse going better."

"I could not have believed it, John," said Harry.

"Nor I," said Archer, "if I had not seen it. 'There then,' Charlie said, as he rode up to us, 'follow that plan, my man, and you will find it answer. Lower your hands when he comes up on end, and send the spurs in once and once only, but quickly and sharply, and so save your neck. You see, Mr. Mowbray,' said Charlie, turning to the farmer, 'in going forwards he is bound to drop; he cannot tumble over when you "shoot" him.'

"'But mind one thing, my man,' said Charlie to the breaker, 'you must not spur him till he is in the air. You want to trick him; so all the time, besides, talk gently to him, as if he were the best-behaved horse out. You thus deceive him; and he will soon think that when he comes up on end in that way he hurts himself, because your kindness, with the hurt, will puzzle him; and if you continue it, it will so bother him,' said Charlie, 'that it will altogether throw him out of count, and he will very soon give it up entirely. You try it, man, for what I say is right; you will completely cure him in a week, if you will, that's certain.'"

"How did the fellow take it?" said Wells.

"Like the magpie," said Archer; "he said but little, but he thought a deal. 'I have had some brutes to manage before to-day, Mr. Mowbray, for one friend or other—besides,' Charlie said, 'I have bred for years, and I break my own, and in a lot of youngsters you do get some most awful tempers—but I have never yet failed,' he said, 'to make them handle well and safe to ride; and except, perhaps, in such a case as this I never punish, and here no more than you have just seen. I have no faith in it, Mr. Mowbray,' said he, 'nor ever had.'"

"He is right enough there, John, as I have found," said Wells.

"Then," said Archer, "Charlie got off the horse and gave him up to the man, and put on his own spurs again and mounted his mare, and then he and the rest of us started for home, he telling Mowbray that if the man failed, to send the horse over to Boscobel, and he himself would cure him. You know it, Harry, for I think you have been there?"

"Yes," said Wells, "I have; and it is a nice place too. It was formerly the Warren; but that was years ago."

"Many years," replied Archer; "in the old people's time. We overtook the hounds, and gently trotted down by the river-side, and got back home at twelve, Charlie well pleased that he had come with me."

"I should think so," said Wells; "quite a jolly morning! He will have the horse, you'll see; that man won't manage him; his nerve is gone—not worth a button, John. I wish," said he, as they crossed the garden for the house, to have a chat with the aunt, "you would stay the night, old fellow; the doctor promised to look in this evening."

"No, not to-night," said Archer.

But he did so; for after tea, time passed so pleasantly, the evening glow had vanished from the ceiling, and gray come before they thought that it was even sunset; so, as the moon would not be up till ten, his horse was bedded.

And when the doctor left after supper to go to his patient on the common, and then, if she was comfortable, to ride to his home in the village, they turned out with him to see how the moon looked, and to have a sniff of the cool night air and to open the gates for him. And as they came back again under the apple-trees in the end orchard, and stayed there as the sound of his horse's hoofs died away, to listen to the owls hooting in the woods just over the water—for those glorious old woods, where the undergrowth was as high as your head and the light only came with a flicker, were on either side of the river, and went billowing away for miles, dipping as the hills dipped—they saw the young moon rising over the treetops, paling as she rose.

So they sat there for a while on the wicket, listening to the weir. And there was a rustle in the hedgerow where the red dead leaves were lying as a stoat moved amongst them; and the dry sticks in the orchard cracked brittle on the trees as they were hit by the apples that

dropped ripe into the grass. And a fox crossed the meadows below them; for they heard amongst the sheep the bell of the bell-wether, that made them look there, and they saw him, like a lengthy brown dog, running by them.

Then, as the wind stirred the bushes that were beside them, and sent a little shiver amongst the leaves on the oak over them, and on the elm that was upon the bank, the murmur of the weir came up to them with a moan, that rose and fell again as the night wind went sighing up the valley, lifting the leaves as it went.

And as they went on up to the house the vault of the heavens looked high, and the stars in the blue of it golden; for the night was a frosty one, and it would be fine on the morrow. And when the white fogs crept on by the water and the wood-shades deepened, the silence of night filled the valley; for all were asleep at the farm, and the birds in the ivy were quiet.

The next morning, after an early breakfast, John Archer was off betimes; while there was a coolness in the air and a catch of frost on the meadows, as it showed now by the river, for the nights got cold there, and while the clematis and the hopbine in the hedges glistened with dew and gossamer. And the blue mists that were up the valley hid the hills, and rolled in light wreaths from the woods and hollows. And the lanes were still and quiet, and the dust upon the roads was unmarked by wheels; and the only sounds to be heard were the caw of the rooks and the songs of birds; and the smoke, with a fine day promise, went straight up between the woods from the cottages that were dotted about there.

It was a morning that suited him, fresh and nice, and with all that sense of breeziness that you get from the rustle of the boughs and the falling of the leaves; for they were fluttering in yellow flakes from the trees, winnowing to the red ones, or drifting across with the breeze to drop lightly into the brambles that lay clustered in the hedges there, purple with blackberries.

And as he left the lanes for the hills, and rode up through the woods by the winding paths—where the light chequered them, and the shadows of the trees fell upon them—he thought of Nature's bounty and her beauties, and of all those unbought pleasures worth the having that

she ever lavishes upon those who love her. And when he had reached the top of the wood, he looked down into the dingles, and he saw far below him, between the long branches of some spreading yews, the valley mellowing in the morning light, as the sun shone, and blue burst through the sky.

So getting off a while to rest his horse, he sat there, looking down into the valley through the tree-trunks, and in the silence drank in all its beauty. And as he watched the shadows creep out from the hedgerows, as the early farm-sounds came up to him—with what pleasure few know but those who love Nature as he loved her—and saw the sunny sweeps of meadow aftermath that were splashed with the purples of the saffron-flowers, he noticed how the long lengths of hop-yards that were beside them—whose tint at sundown is a sight to see—looked amber in the light, and with what a sheen the willowy river that was flickering in the sun shone so far away.

And he also noticed on the uplands, where but so short a time ago white barley swayed and golden corn was bending—for the harvest always fell late there to the sickles of the reapers—how pure in the morning light were the tints upon the stubbles, and how well they came in between the rich browns in the woods, where the trees were russeting, and how good was the backing to them of the woods beyond, that went sloping high up the hills with their colours—their grays and their blues and their purples—till they swept to their crest or went over them.

Then, as he mounted again to go home, as a light breeze rose, soft gray clouds that were white-edged moved through the blue over him, and their shadows chased the sunshine in the valley. And seeing it as he did there, framed by the olive-green of the trees that were before him, he felt the beauty of it.

And then, in his own quiet way, John Archer rode on thoughtfully to his home at the Grange.

CHAPTER V.

ANDREWS OF CONEY GREEN AND THE HAMLET OF HONEYBROOK.

"GOOD-MORNING," said Oliver to Andrews, as they met by the Fox hotel in the county town, and rode into the yard together. "Why, what became of you, Ted, the other day; we never saw an inch of your countenance, old fellow, after we left the gorse—did you come to grief?"

"I did," was the reply, "and intense grief, over some stiff rails down by Furze-hill, where I had a regular purler and a lost shoe; with hounds going like steam, and no blacksmith handy. So I got thrown out, and I turned for home; which, considering it was the first day of the season, and there was a splendid 'field' out, was certainly a nuisance. You had a very good run, George, I hear."

"Yes," said Oliver, "we had, for an hour and forty minutes, with only that slight check by the park-palings, through those beggarly sheep getting out; but which, by the bye, as letting you up amongst us, was a good thing for you. Well, come in," said he, as they left the stables and turned into a corridor bright with greenery; "what are you going to have?"

"Oh, some of the old sort, I suppose," said Andrews, "some bitter; there is nothing better, I think. Have you sold your hops?"

"All but a few pockets; but I am in no hurry, for prices are up, and mine is a clean sample. I wish I had not sold," said Oliver; "they will fetch more money yet. 'Farnhams' are middling, and there are but few 'Olds' left."

Entering "the bar," which, as it was market-day, was filled with farmers, graziers, hop-growers, and others—most of them local men, and many of them friends or acquaintances—they shook hands with some and nodded to others, and then, as the hunting men amongst them continued to discuss "the good thing they had on Tuesday," the conversation merged from hops and crops to hounds and horses.

Sitting about there—a light and airy room, and large and lofty, with cosy nooks, pot-ferns and flowers, and couches—were many of the best men in the district; that

being, on market days, the great meeting-place, the resort of many, and a lounge for all.

And it was there that, on the last day of each week, gossip was retailed, reports floated, prices fixed, and the runs of the week talked over. It was there, too, that the Hunt-dinners were held; the landlord, genial and gentlemanly, and great in greyhounds, being a large subscriber and a thorough sportsman; as was also his son, who, mounted well, went well.

But while the hunting men stretch it as to fences, and the dealers stretch it as to price, it will be well to give here a few words about the two friends, who, seated in a quiet corner, were looking over the papers, and deep in the mysteries of the "Country Markets."

Oliver, a good-looking young fellow of about five or six and twenty, was a hop-grower, well and favourably known in the district as "a good sort and a straight goer"—a summary of character meaning much—and resident, as was his friend Andrews, in a small hamlet that was pretty and picturesque, and twelve miles distant from the station. Both were in easy circumstances, and Andrews the richer; he being the son of a Manchester merchant, who was reputed to be wealthy, and known to be charitable.

The eldest son, Robert, was in business with his father, and this one, the second son, Edward, or "Teddy," as they called him, being a good shot and fond of hunting, the old man took a small farm for him at Honeybrook, in the Teme valley, and on the Herefordshire side of the river; a hamlet that was backed by high hills and faced by wood and water; and the farm was a fruitful farm, and it had just enough land about it to give employment to his son, and so keep him from being idle. And he liked Honeybrook; for, as he said when he came to settle at it, "it was really a jolly little place, and so snug and quiet."

And so it was; for it lay in a hollow low down in a long drip in the valley, with wooded hills overlooking it; and with hopyards sliding into it; and it was so hidden by old hawthorns and apple-trees, and clumps and garden growths, that you had to come upon it all at once, which made it the jollier.

For the way into it dropped suddenly between high banks, that were rough and tangled with gorse and fox-glove roots, and with fern and brambles; where the rabbits

stayed and looked at you, and the birds sang on as you passed into the shadow of the limes, listening to the bees.

And at the bottom of the bank, in the sunlight—for the trees ended there—was the church; where the road turned short round to the left by the rookery, and you got such a splendid bit of open country and river scenery, across the big pool at the court-house, past the island where the flag flapped.

The church, too, was an old one, heavy with ivy, and gray and weather-stained, and you went down steps into it; and as you came quietly down the bank leading your horse, you saw that the trees framed it, and that the square tower and the great yews stood out clearly against the high elms, under an arch of sky, and with a backing of cornfields and copses, with hills behind them that stretched away up the valley, graying as they went; and there was a deep-blue distance beyond them that you caught as the white pigeons swept across it when they flew from the tithe-barn to the lich-gate, to coo and flutter there, until the schoolgirls came to swing and play about the mounting-block, and to caw at the rooks squabbling in the rookery.

And also at the bottom of the bank was a brook—you could hear the ripple of it before you saw it—that, though it was made to dip there under the road, to leave all dry at the church, and to make foam-falls in the shrubberies, yet did pretty much as it liked up the village. So, as it had the lane to itself, it made it “a watery lane” for a mile or more—except a bit of a strip on the high bank above it, just for the foot-people—from where it came out of the woods and through the meadows, and brought the trout with it from under the big stones in the dingles, where the light was twilight, from the close boughs meeting.

But shallow as the brook was, there were some good trout in it; for you could see them poising or darting for the banks as you rode splashing through it. For after you got beyond the church and the farm buildings, and passed the ivied house where the sparrows were—and where they let you know they were—and the half-timbered houses with the cut yews and the box-borders, and the red-brick place with the bushed laurustinuses and the dove-cot, the road so narrowed that it became all brook!

So you just swung your legs up on each side of the

saddle, to save spottling your stirrup-irons, and let your horse enjoy the coolness of it, as well as yourself, as you "lolloped" along, chatting to the old women in the gardens, or gossiping with the youngsters paddling in the brook for primroses, or whatever happened to be growing there on the banks beside it.

Not that they wanted them, by any means, as all the banks were yellow with them, or bright with the other flowers that in their turn grew there; but the having to go into the water for them was a something they ought not to do, and so they enjoyed it, as you could see when they scampered out—the young monkeys!—and put their stockings on, laughing as only hearty and happy children can laugh. You could hear their joyous little screams so long after you left them, that you would turn a time or two in your saddle, thinking they were near you.

And a very jolly little brook it was too; for, except at flood-time, it was shallow enough to have plenty of tinkle about it, for it had lots of twistings and rippings where the sandstone ridged it. And up above it, and on either side of it, were some thatched cottages—old gray ones; and some gardens and orchards; and a little farm or two, where there were fowls about; and a wheelwright's, where the path widened; and some cherry-orchards, with some red-tiled cottages, and some bee-hives by them; and a dismal-looking old place, with some poplars round it, that was shut up, because it was "haunted of a ghost, sir."

All the way up, indeed, was pretty; for the women there were great hands at hollyhocks and gillies, and rose-bushes and scarlet-runners, that they trained by the privet-hedges for the passers-by to see, and to give them an excuse for a gossip with them whenever they had the chance of it; for the old dames would stand, scissors in hand, by the bushes, making believe to be trimming them.

It was a nice-smelling place too, all about there; for what with the violets and the sweetbrier, and the beans and "the blossom," and the honeysuckles and the meadow-sweet, and the whiffs of hay, each in its season, there was no lack of sweet scents in that village.

But the best of it all was up at the end there, where the road branched off at the foot-bridge to go to the next hamlet; and where you looked across the dingle to the big fox-cover, where they always "found," or up the long stubbles

to the grass-lands, that sloped to the sky and the white clouds. For it was there that the orchards were thicker and the fruit was the finest; and when they were heaped all over with their red and their white blossom, and thick with bees, and loud with the hum of them, the scent that was there then was a thing to be remembered.

Altogether it was an old-fashioned fruity little place, where the farmers sold hops and cider, and the cottagers eggs and "posies." For they went to market on Saturdays, and they thanked the Lord other days; and though they did "putt" their legs up "o' Sundays, and think'd o' nothin'," when their old rector was exhorting them, they certainly were a devout people, for they "thanked the Lord" for everything, from hop-bines to honey.

If Bella Birch was got to school after a boxing, or Jane Styles had her flowers "cheapened," or Theresa Simpson's youngest had to be revaccinated, or the "rampagious" donkey was pounded, or the relieving-officer's pony lost "altogether," they were that contented sort of people that they were equally grateful—so "thanked the Lord" for all and everything, as "became them" as Christians.

And they had their manners also; for they "sir'd" the pig-killer, and "good man'd" the postman, and did hat-in-hand to the parson, who, poor man, being seventy-eight and short-sighted, often mistook their "obeysance" for asking arms, and would potter on with, "I never give money to beggars—bad plan, bad plan; give you some meat though; come round, come round."

It was a very early place too; for except when they had company at the court-house, all the villagers looked to snore at eight in the winter and nine in the summer, "reg'lar like;" but when "the company came, they willingly robbed themselves of their rest to "see the carriages" and "the gentlefolks." Hence, going to bed so early, they were early risers; and they brushed the dew off the grass, and they made their mark in the meadows; for they were up betimes, and were out with the lark; which, as one of them observed, as he perhaps thought of his younger days—he was only sixty-three, and it served the juvenile old boy all the day after to tell it amongst the mowers—was better than being out "for one."

And "Teddy" went amongst them, and liked them, and they liked him; and they testified publicly that "his head

was screwed on, and his heart in the right place ;” which, besides being a satisfactory state of things anatomically and mechanically, at once put him right with the whole village ; so right, in fact, that he never was known after that to be short of wasp-cake or whipcord ; the two things they always asked you to have of them when they really did like you—the first to ’tice the fish, and the second to tickle the animal in the dog-cart.

So he made up his mind to stay there ; for, as he said, “ It’s a nightingale place, my dear fellow, for the meadows are cowslip ones ; and the lanes are filled with violets, purple and white ones, plentiful as daisies ; and there are primroses on the banks, and wild flowers in the woods, so thick there that you crush them as you walk. And ‘ the blossom ’ is glorious—cherry and plum, and pear and apple—and its smell delicious ; and the hops are splendid ; and the fishing and the shooting and the hunting there is each first-rate.” So that, as all there appeared to him to be superlative, he could not well do less than be satisfied.

But as he knew but little of farming when, eighteen months previously, he took to it, his father employed a bailiff to superintend the farm for him and to see to the tilling. Oliver, therefore, whose own farm lay but three miles from there—just on the outskirts of the parish—kindly offered his services, when they met one evening at the rectory, in the way of supervision and general information ; so that ere long the two near neighbours became firm friends, and hunted, shot, and fished together ; and their sisters, Loo and Cissy, had but few secrets from each other.

With such companionship, and with the benefit of his friend’s experience, the bailiff was parted with at the year’s end ; and the little farm, “ Coney Green,” only a hundred and forty acres, was now, and had been for the past six months, entirely managed by Andrews himself, who, from constantly associating with the farmers of the district, was fast getting into those plain, sensible, and homely ways which, causing a wholesome horror of debt, made them the manly men they were—sturdy, free-feeling, and independent ; able and willing to pay their way, “ if so be it pleased God the rain didn’t beat ’em.”

Barely two and twenty, with excellent health and spirits, an iron constitution, and an even temper, hospitable

to a degree, and with the means for hospitality—no wonder that Andrews, or, as he was familiarly called by his friends, “Teddy Andrews,” was well liked. But with sound sense and good general knowledge he had yet a marked simplicity of manner that indicated credulity, and that often laid him open to the designs of the crafty. More than once had he been “well bitten;” and more than once had George Oliver counselled caution in the varied dealings of buying and selling incidental to his pursuits. In horses he was especially weak, fancying, like many others, that because he had hunted for two seasons, all the “points” of a horse must necessarily be known to him.

Honest himself, and thoroughly straightforward, he ever thought others were the same; and “wearing his heart upon his sleeve,” he never suspected duplicity, never imagined deceit. To use a West-country phrase, “he showed his cards, and they trumped his trick; he opened his mouth, and the man jumped down it;” a duplex saying for the same thing—too little reticence and too much belief; a combination of circumstances that has brought many a man to grief.

Returning now to the other occupants of the room, their conversation continued in an animated strain for some time; then, each going out on his own business, they separated, to meet again at “the ordinary” up-stairs, or later in the bar, so as to have a chat together before riding home.

CHAPTER VI.

MOONLIGHT ON THE HILLS—EXPERIENCE PAID FOR

“HAVE you any more to do?” asked Oliver, as they met again in the evening; for it had been a busy day with him, and he was later than usual.

“Only,” was the reply, “to call about some fish I ordered, to see if they have sent it to the carrier. I shall be back again in ten minutes, and then,” said Andrews, “I am ready when you are.”

“Well,” said Oliver, “I don’t want to be too late home; so I will order the horses, Ted, and wait in the yard.”

Half an hour later they were in the saddle, and with a splendid evening before them for their journey home.

Passing under the old high tower of the cathedral, they went along the quay up to the bridge, that took them out into the open country, and thence to districts full of rich pasture-land and hops and orchards. And they rode on by the old-fashioned gardens in the suburbs, and reached the outskirts.

And as they passed the quaint houses there, with their long avenues and their pigeon-boxes and their stately trees, the evening glow had spread across the landscape, and had caught with its golden light the country-seats that lay around there, belted by copses, and with water by them. And they went on, by pastures and stubbles and plough-land, to by-lanes and commons, where the gorse was a mass and the gipsies were numerous. Then, checking their horses as they got near a hill, Andrews broke silence thus :

"Where did you go to when I came to grief? I don't know if they have it in the *Herald*."

"Kept to the scent, and went on, Ted," said Oliver. "The hounds," said he, "soon crossed the road, and springing the fence together, they raced along the meadows as mute as mice, till suddenly they dipped and showed again; and then, as they 'broke' well in line, their chorus came to us most musically. We knew by that some brookwork was before us, and that pace was needed, for it was Overdale—a racing bit, and always many in it. I don't suppose you know it, Ted," said he.

"What, Overdale? Few people but know that," said Andrews, "either by sad experience or by name. The former, George, would certainly have been mine had not I been thrown out."

"You missed a bath, old fellow, I believe," said Oliver. "Its banks are honeycombed from being washed by very frequent floods, and they have straight sides, just like a railway cutting; so that where they are not slanted for the cattle, it is no easy matter to effect a landing. The last time we had it," said he, "seven out of twelve—though they were first-flight men—were into it, and under, and bobbing about like big floats in the water; so that will tell you that it takes some doing."

"Yes," Andrews said, "I have heard it is a clipper."

"As we got near it," continued Oliver, "Stevens—on the gray—gave us 'a lead,' for he was on his water-jumper; and cleverly he did it. Burton went next, and safely dropped the chestnut—his hot one—and Warden after him, along with Archer. Then Wells, then King, one down, one in; I next," said Oliver, "and missed a grassing, 'Beauty' stumbling. Just as we were getting into stride again, thud comes Fred Collins right against the bank, and vanishes; Jem Griffin too, who took it at the widest. And after we had landed, and turned in our saddles," said he, "to see who got in and who got over, we saw lots rushing at it as hard as they could pelt; glad, no doubt, to have it soon over. Some did get over, but a lot got in; but as there was a stiff line of rails in the pasture, that needed both eyes and hands, it prevented our watching them. But afterwards, on 'counting up the noses,' we made but sixteen total. The rest—a good large 'field'—being brooked, or roadsters; for they never reached us till we had killed our fox.

"You will see the line we took; it is in the *Field*. I met the postman as I came," said Oliver, "and looked. He took the papers on, though, with the letters; but you shall have it when we send to-morrow. Loo has some things she has worked, Ted, for your sister."

"Thanks," said Andrews; "Cissy will be pleased. Much stiff, George?"

"Well, yes," said he; "but a splendid country, with doubles and good rails, and brooks and bullfinches. I got my full share, Ted, in size and 'nasty' places, so I was thankful; still for the pickers there were donkey fences, which some I know negotiated calmly, as if they really thought them worth the doing. Just fancy!" George said.

"There certainly are men who'd jump a thistle, and cast about how they shall best get over some small gutter; and yet come out," said Andrews, "with the hounds, to say they do so. It is most laughable."

"It is," said Oliver, "wild in the lanes, but frightened in the fields. Macadam courage coupled with fence-fever. Such men should always come out with a crupper, and hold on to it stoutly.

"The view from here," said he, as they reached the brow of the hill—Crookthorpe Hill—"I always think is so fine. I do not wonder at people pulling up to look at

it. Even now, sloping away as it does for miles and miles, though half its charms are hidden in the duskiess, it is very beautiful," said Oliver; "don't you think so, Ted?"

"Yes," said Andrews; "it is almost as fine as that from Harry Wells's place, or from the hill by Manor Wood."

"They meet there shortly," said Oliver. "John Archer is going; but it is too outlying a fixture for me, at least just then. It is a long way from his place; but I think he intends getting up to Fred Collins the night before, so as to be handy for it."

"I have never been there with hounds," said Ted; "but we had a picnic there last summer—that is, June twelvemonths—and I thought it then," said he, "a very jolly place, and the view magnificent."

But as George Oliver remarked, the view from where they were was then, as they saw it, even in the dusk, "very beautiful;" for so golden was the sky with evening glow, the wooded hills looked black that closed the valley, giving a grandeur to their long length of sky-line; and just above it was a flight of rooks, flying from their feeding-grounds straight home to roost. And down beneath it were deep purple shadows, cut by white fog, that, rising to a level from the meadows, looked like a river.

And as the gold got green, as Andrews and Oliver rode onwards, some glow-worm lights shone out upon the hills from cottages; and lower down the slopes some larger lights were seen as well, from farms; and in the hollows they were also twinkling, and thickening around a red one—the forge-fire that was down in the village below, where the blacksmith was busy; for, as they came down the hill, they could both hear the clink on his anvil.

As the green got gray, and they went by the mill in the flat, where the big pool and the willows and the half-sunken boat and the putchins were, it was all silent there—silent as the wheel; for work was over, and the bats were skimming.

Then the gray got blue, and the stars came out, one by one, as Ted and Oliver trotted through the valley; and by the time they had reached the woods the sky was thick with them. And they rode on there along the bridle-paths, scaring the owls and starting many a rabbit in the glades that were dusky beneath them. And when they

emerged from under the tall trees, and passed from the darkness of them into the white light upon the hills, it was indeed beautiful; for the moon was rising, and the yews and the hawthorns were throwing their long shadows on the turf, that lay white in the moonbeams.

And they rode there silently in the moonlight, for the turf was too soft and springy to give back their footfalls; and the only sound they heard was the clank of the little gates as they passed through them.

And at the end of the hills they again passed into the darkness of the woods. And when, at last, they left them, and began to dip down to the lanes for home, the moonlight had fallen upon the valley, and they could see, as the moon caught it, the white streak of the river through the trees in the hedgerows; for the fog in the meadows was thin, and it lay lightly on the grass. And they hastened on along the lanes between the copse-bordered banks to the cross-roads; and there they pulled up, as their ways diverged, Andrew's farm, Coney Green, lying to the right, and Oliver's, the Brook Farm, three miles to the left of it.

"Will you come round with me, old fellow, for a pipe?" said Andrews. "It won't take you long, and you need not be back, you know, till after supper."

"No, not to-night," said George; "it is much too late, and I have to pay the men, for I was short of change this morning, and they will be waiting for me; and Loo will too. Not to-night."

"Well, mind and come on Monday, then, to dinner, and see just what you think of my new purchase—a bay, my boy—a fizzer!"

"What, on the deal again?" said Oliver. "Who is the biter?"

"Implying by that term," said Andrews, "that I am 'bitten.' Why, Murby. I met with him on Tuesday out with hounds. He rode up when I came to grief, and pointed out a smith's shop, and went with me; so we rode home together."

"And made a deal, of course?" said Oliver. "Catch Murby civil if he can't gain by it!"

"Yes, made a deal," said Ted; "a good one too!"

"O youth and innocence," said George, "how art thou victimised! No greater 'do' than he, Ted, walks in shoes. What was the figure?"

"Thirty."

"And what the purchase?"

"A cob, a dappled bay; round as a barrel, and with four black legs; strong as an elephant, and a splendid stepper—a noted trotter. He looks like carrying me right well to market, and giving most upon the road the go-by."

"By running clean away the first time you try him!"

"Not so, friend George; now don't you be severe. He is good with hounds too, and knows the stone-wall business. He was with the 'Cotswold' in the Bredon country."

"And all that lot," said Oliver, "for thirty?"

"Yes, with half-crown out, chop-money."

"O Teddy, Teddy, 'sold' again art thou, you helpless innocent! Why, Jemmy Murby is the 'deadest nail' in all the country, that everybody knows; and so might you have heard. Why, he would even do his father in a deal for twopence-halfpenny, and think it clever!"

"Wait, wait, George, wait," said Andrews; "you have not seen the cob—you will find you are mistaken just for once."

"I only hope, for your sake, that I am; I fear I am not. A good bay cob," said Oliver, "like that, is worth, ay twice that sum, as park-hack for some gentleman in town, to daily pound along for constitutional in Rotten Row. Thirty pounds indeed! If he is sound, a dealer would give fifty. When can I see him?"

"Oh, to-morrow."

"Well, to-morrow's Sunday."

"Say Monday, then," said Andrews. "I shall be in all day. Come early, and to dinner. Then see him, ride him, and try him round the fences."

"I'll look him over first."

"Oh, he can jump," said Ted, "for Murby told me so."

"No doubt he can, at sudden swipe of some good double thong, and from the one side of the stable to the other. Oh Ted!" laughed Oliver.

"George, you are too bad. He is, as you will find for once, a good one."

"All right; I'll see him. Oh, what about his tail?"

"He has one."

"Now has he, though?" said George. "However could they do it at the price! Good-night, old boy. On Monday, then, I will come across and see him."

"Well, don't forget. Good-night; and come," said Ted, "to dinner."

And as the noise of their horses' hoofs died away, and the one sound ceased before the other, through the winding lanes and distance that was different, there was stillness and silence; for the night was calm and quiet, and it was only in the neighbouring woods that the least sound could be heard, for the wind was at rest, and it had not yet rustled up the valley.

But there the leaves were dropping dead from the trees; for the life had gone out of them, and they had lifted their last to the blue sky over them. And they were drifting from the boughs to the brambles, to fall into the ferns; and to find there a resting-place on moss and grass. And the canopy that would be over them would be of green and gold; for the time was autumn, and the ferns were flushing.

And when Monday came George Oliver rode over to Honeybrook to Andrew's farm there—Coney Green—that was close to "the watery lane," and had the horse out.

"He is not bad-looking, that is certain, Teddy," said he, as Andrews stood him, with his head up, by the stables.

"Put the lad on him, and then let him walk."

"He is a fairish mover. Now, boy," said Oliver, "just slowly trot him on towards the gate, turn him sharp round and canter back to us."

"He goes well, certainly," said he, as the boy pulled up.

"I told you so," said Andrews, "but you would not believe it."

"Don't be too fast, Ted; we will wait a bit. Just take him on again, my lad," said Oliver, "a good brisk trot, and at the same pace bring him back again."

"There now, jump off," said he.

"Ah, I thought as much! Look here, Ted. Do you know what that means?" said Oliver, picking up the horse's leg as he spoke; "bevelled for 'speedy cut;' to hit with horn, not iron. Feel here," said he, "you see it is quite tender even now. That is the place he hits when, as you say, he trots out 'straight and sharp.' There is dirt upon it. He is dear at thirty pence. I would not even have him as a gift; for when he does come down, it will," said Oliver, "be like a shot, and without notice."

"See here again; my fingers are quite greasy. That is

the stuff they use for broken knees," said George; "to hide white hair. Had your lad cleaned his knees, you would have seen it. Here, boy," said he, "go to the house and ask them for an iron and some brown paper—the iron hot. We shall see, then," said Oliver, "if what I say is right."

"Well, this, I must say, is an awful nuisance. I thought for once," said Ted, "I had done well. He told me all about him, and seemed so candid. I never thought of looking at the shoeing, or getting hold of him below the knee."

"And which you should have done," said Oliver, "as I have told you. Here comes the lad; so now then, Ted, for test. The grease removed, I think you will find a patch, white under black. Just as I thought—look there!

"‘A speedy cutter,’ with two broken knees. You’re done, old fellow. Sell him for what he will fetch; for if you don’t he will break your neck before you are ten days older."

"‘Thrown out’ you were," said Oliver, "we know; also ‘let in.’"

"‘The world’s a wicked one, and ‘sharps’ are in it;
For ‘flats,’ you see, are picked up in a minute!’"

"Put the brute in," said Ted; "Cissy is calling us to come to dinner."

CHAPTER VII.

A CHAT IN THE STUDIO—JOHNSON AND KATE ARCHER.

"WELL, Johnson, how are you?" said Archer, as he turned into the studio in Elm-tree-walk, and found his friend—as usual there—busy at a canvas. "Why don't you stick that horrible creation in the corner?" said he, giving the lay figure a tap on the head as he passed it, that altered the balance of it, and stopped it peering into the colour-box; "it is enough to startle a fellow! Here, hide his countenance, man, for goodness sake," said Archer, as he picked up a wideawake and brought it down with a bang over the face of it. "How you do work, Johnson?"

"It is play to me, Archie," was the reply. "*Labor ipse voluptas*. When do you return to the Grange?" said Johnson.

"Oh, in about a fortnight, I suppose," said Archer; "there will be some home-fixtures about then."

"I think I shall be back about then myself, just for a week or two; and after that I must make my headquarters here," said Johnson, "and for some time too. I can't half work at home with all those woods and hills tempting one to be idle; and I hope you will come in too when you can, old fellow; for if we are to keep faith with the huntsman, when the frost comes, and he is off duty, we must be up at the kennels a little oftener than we have been. There are those hounds and the old gray that you 'rubbed in,'" said he, "just in the same state as they were a month ago."

"Well, you finish them," said Archer, "there's a good fellow; it is to be a joint affair, you know, so it will be all one. His old woman, as he calls her, is pretty proud about it."

"Why did you not come in to my place last night?" said Johnson. "Two of the St. John's Wood men were there, Dick Simms and Perrot; they are down from town for just a day or two. Dick's picture was accepted, by the bye, and sold."

"Where at—the Dudley?"

"No, at Suffolk Street; they hung him well."

"I am glad of that," said Archer, "for he is such a decent fellow; and Perrot, has he sold?"

"The larger one he has, but not the others. He has a commission though for a pair of small ones. Two 'circulars'" said Johnson.

"That's right," said Archer. "Did they say how all the fellows were at the old quarters?"

"Oh, scratching at it," said Johnson, "with a few sales in the season to help the 'pot-boilers.'"

"Have they hung you in New Street?" said Archer.

"Yes, and fairly. I have had a letter from the secretary, and I find," said Johnson, "that they have used me very well—one next below 'the line,' two just above it, and the other picture they have 'skied;' but it was a duffer and not up to much—that heathy bit I got at Stanton Common. You remember it; I mulled the foreground?"

"Yes," replied Archer; "it was not your best one, certainly; but they ought to have managed you line space for that woodland one, because it was really a good picture."

"I am glad you like it," said Johnson; "but however good a picture might be, they know that I am but an outsider, an amateur, and therefore they have no idea of giving me priority in the hanging over one who paints for a living; and I cannot blame them. I only wonder they give me a place at all; but their secretary is a very good fellow, and they are a good sort there altogether, a very good sort," said Johnson, "and they hang impartially. You were out with the hounds, I think, yesterday?"

"Yes," said Archer, "I was, or I should have been with you; but when you come to kick your tops off, and settle down before a rousing fire, you do not feel much inclined after a day's hunting to turn out again. It was late, too, when I returned; the clock struck seven as I left the station; and after dinner I dropped off fast asleep, tired out."

Johnson was a very good fellow, and he and Archer were great chums. They were together in Rome for some time, as we have seen, sketching with some other men, and at home also they were often sketching out on the hills and in the woods; for though Archer did but little in that way himself, Johnson painted regularly—"fadding" at it, as he said, "for the love of it," and more for occupation than from necessity; for come of a good family, and the son of a barrister of some standing, he was left at his father's death in a comfortable position; so the Civil Service knew him no longer.

And it was then that he left London, and settled in Worcestershire; having been delighted with the scenery there, and in the adjoining county of Herefordshire, when he came down on a visit to Archer, whose acquaintance he had made in the Temple Gardens. For when Johnson could get away from Somerset House for an hour or so, "on important business," as he said, connected probably with the Red-tape Room or the Sealing-wax Department, he used to go there and sit by the fountain, to allow his mind to relax a little from "the cares of office."

Had they met under any other circumstances, as for instance in a railway carriage, they would not of course have spoken to each other, however long the journey, as Englishmen are not in the habit of doing so; but as all the surroundings there were equally congenial to them, after they had sat by each other for some weeks they became

acquainted, and accident bringing them still closer together, they agreed for a time—as they were then both resident at Bayswater, Johnson having recently removed there from Pimlico—that they would occupy the same rooms; and so before Archer left London they were chums together.

And their rooms were very well situated, for they were near to those of some artist friends who lived there, and who had also a studio at Notting Hill; which, well placed in a quiet part, and with a good north light, was jointly occupied by them and by some St. John's Wood men, Simms and Perrot being of the number; and there were few evenings that Johnson and John Archer did not turn in there to have a chat amongst “the paint-pots,” and assist in the fumigation of the room; the smell of paint, as Simms observed, being “unhealthy.”

Living afterwards in Worcestershire, in the same neighbourhood, they saw a good deal of each other; for even when Johnson went to town for a week or two for a change, and squeezed a lot of colour away at the studio he had there—in the Elm-tree-walk—as an incentive to work while he was amongst his friends in the city, Archer would be sure to be riding over and looking in upon him, for they were great friends and good neighbours, and were well suited to each other.

It had been hinted too of late amongst those who knew them that, if they lived long enough, they might also become relations, as Archer had a sister, who was tall and shapely, and fair to look upon; and Johnson, as an artist, was not blind to beauty.

And the beauty of Miss Kate Archer came so very near to that ideal type depicted by artists, but so seldom met with, that it was a bad case with Johnson from the first time he saw her; and they did say—that is, the gossips in the village—that when he came and settled there, because “the scenery” was so pretty, they thought that Miss Archer was included in it. And though she was too good-looking for her lady friends to praise her, it was generally conceded that she was “really a nice girl,” who, with lady-like accomplishments, had also a thorough knowledge of home duties, and was as well versed in domestic economy as she was in art and literature, and who, therefore, while able to see to the management of the kitchen, could yet hold her own in the drawing-room.

But not only was she able to do so, but she was sensible enough to be at all times willing to do so whenever she could lend a helping hand there; for, as her old maiden aunts observed, "she has always been brought up properly, my dear, and has no nonsensical pride about her; so will make a good useful wife for any man."

And as Johnson was often pottering about there, when she was deep in the mysteries of apple-dumplings, or shelling peas, or feeding fowls, or busy with the butter in the dairy—for though Archer was not a farmer, he had cows and poultry, and grew enough hay for his horses—and as on such occasions she had seldom anything on better than a plain print-dress or a figured muslin, and would look rosy, and could not help looking pretty, the poor fellow got hit very hard indeed; and, old bachelor as he looked, it was soon evident that he wanted a wife, and he meant to have one.

So, as they all knew he was a determined sort of fellow when he had set his mind on anything, those in the neighbourhood began to look very knowing, and said they would "make a match of it." And they hoped it would be so, for Johnson was a fine tall fellow, with a frank face and a big beard, and the people about there thought a good deal of him, and liked him; for he used to sketch their little ones, and gossip with themselves; and whenever he had a chance of doing good amongst them—the poorer portion—he did not miss it.

For he was old-fashioned enough to remember that kind words and sympathy, are acceptable, if even you have not spare cash about you; and though they cost nothing to the giver, they are often worth a good deal to the receiver; and that when it is so easy to do good, and to give pleasure to those who need it, it is a wrong thing and a selfish thing, and a pity too, if you do not do it, if only to get into that belief that people who exercise it do get into, that, take it altogether, the world is not such a very bad world after all; only much of the good that is in it lies below the surface, and is seldom met with till you look for it.

"That seems to be a good bit you are doing there," said Archer, getting up and looking at the canvas Johnson was at work at.

"It will be, I hope," was the reply, "when I have

finished it, and I have got all the high lights in. How about this one, Archie?" said Johnson, taking the picture off the easel, and putting on to it a partly-finished one that was face to the wall on the floor. "That foreground bothers me; I always fail there in force or colour, or some confounded thing or other," said he, pointing with his mahl-stick to some foreground detail. "I think it needs fresh eyes on it, for mine are tiring."

"Well, you are the best judge," said Archer, "but I fancy it wants light."

"But how will you get it with those rain-clouds over? The picture, as you see, is 'Storm clearing off.'

"Just so," said Archer; "then clear the clouds by rifting them still more, so as to show the sky behind and get the blue reflected in the water."

"You are right," said Johnson. "A streak of emerald, please, there by your hand, to tone the blue and take the crudeness out, and I will scumble some in here; it will improve it. There," said he, as he did so; "that, then, is about it. One change makes others, Archie. I shall have now to alter the colours of these cows. I think red, black, and dun will suit them best. What say you?"

"Try it inside the blue there, on the palette; here are the tubes."

"Thanks; only just a squeeze. I see," said Johnson. "Yes, that is just the thing; just what was wanted. The colour in the water forces them and brings them out."

"A gleam of light too in that left-hand corner would help your distance, and make those hills recede a mile or more; at least, I think so."

"It would," said Johnson. "Give me the megilp. Well, what did you do out yesterday? Was Collins with you?"

"Oh yes," said Archer; "the immortal Fred was there in fullest force, and on the chestnut, but only through the first run that we had, and scarcely that, for, falling at a brook, he lamed his horse; so he got disgusted and then turned for home. I landed," Archer said, "and as hounds were making for a wildish country, I left him at it."

"Settle alongside, Archie, in this chair; then I can paint and listen. Now fire away," said Johnson, "and tell me what you met with worth the seeing—effects and good bits suitable for canvas, and all about them; in case, from

laziness or stress of weather, I get hard up for them, too idle may be to turn out and search. What you describe I see," said Johnson; "and cloud effects and scenes as named by you have come in usefully in views I have commenced but never finished, until short of subject maybe in the winter, when I 'cook' them up a bit by composition. A shocking plan, you'll say; but then I am lazy, or rather, Archie, I begin too many and only finish a few of them; and so, when I come upon them long afterwards, I touch and touch until I make them up. They are hybrid pictures, and for practice only. All those I sell are finished for the most part in the open; and so ought all to be. I am never satisfied with what I do," said Johnson; "and so, you see, I get into bad habits."

"Just so," said Archer; "then paint the fewer, and finish as you do them, and put a check on your designing talent. It is all very well, you know, for a book illustrator; but for my part," said he, "one good picture painted on the spot is worth a score of those pretty fancies, as you would find, old man, if you had to get your living by it."

"Yes," said Johnson, "I am quite aware of it, and I know it is a very bad propensity; but it is my unfortunate habit of drawing odds and ends that gets me into it. Come, let that dog alone now, and settle down a bit—poor Tiney!—and tell me about yesterday, and what you did."

"Very well," said Archer, ceasing to munch Tiney; "anything for a quiet life, old fellow. After you, Johnson, with the light—thanks. Where we met, then," said he, "was at the Manor Wood, and I went to Fred's place the overnight by train, so as to get away as early as possible the next morning, to give us time to look round at the country. Do you know it?"

"No; only by Vernon's picture, that with the sweep of hills and woodland country; the one that he sold so well straight off the easel. You must remember it," said Johnson.

"A. L.?" said Archer.

"No; by W. H.," said he. "Where the autumn leaves are fluttering from the trees, and the foreground is splashed with the colour of them, in amongst the ferns and

brambles, and where you have such a splendid bit of blue and purple distance, miles up the valley."

"I think," replied Archer, "I know the one you mean, though he has painted several pictures of the valley and the woods about there, and the old lanes at the back of them, that, bowered over as they are, get so gloriously russet, when their banks are littered with leaves and their ruts matted with the mass of them, and when the only greens in them are those jolly velvet mosses, that serve," said he, "when a fellow has the object of his small affections by him, Johnson, as a cosy-cushioned seat at the foot of a gray oak, while he wrestles with opportunity at the sight of the upturned lips of the loved one, as she is looking for the bees in the ivy blossoms; at least, she tries to make him think so."

"Does she?" said Johnson, as he strengthened the light to make the hills recede, and stopped out a bit of blue that he found tell too strongly. "I can hear you have been through it, old fellow. Ah, I have myself noticed," said he, "when I have been out sketching in some of the old quiet lanes like those you speak of, where the banks are high and the roots of the trees come out of them, how singular it is that, where those roots run about the road, there should so often be dots on the one side of them and scores on the other—just as though a parasol and a walking-stick had been there side by side. Something to do, perhaps, with the bees in the ivy-blossoms."

"I should not wonder," said Archer; "but I will ask old Vernon, as he wanders about the lanes a good deal, fixing their beauties on the canvas."

"Well, if he does not 'cook' his sketches, it is a fine bit of country out there, certainly," said Johnson.

"He never 'cooks,'" said Archer, "for I have been with him; we leave all that to you. He paints all on the spot, like Millais and Leader, and Vicat Cole and Hulme; and he is therefore, as they are, always true to nature, as you may see," said he, "in every one he does. They are full of atmosphere—nice breezy-looking pictures, in fact, with some wind in them, that seems to bend the grass and to stir the water, and to sway the branches about as the leaves blow on them."

"Yes; I know them," said Johnson. "They are good pictures, and in good keeping; and, with their broad

cloud-shadows and their moving clouds, they have a true out-door look about them that is very natural. I believe he is out in all weather for effects, and only works from studies in the worst of the winter; and a good plan too," said Johnson, "though I don't practise it."

CHAPTER VIII.

AUTUMN TINTS AND WOODLAND SCENERY.

"I CANNOT myself stand the cold," continued Johnson, stepping back a bit to see how the sky was coming, now he had got the light in, "unless I am in exercise, and then I don't care how cold it is; and though I do sell a few canvases occasionally to friends who want them, and exhibit a bit for the say-so, as a sop to one's vanity, Archie, and for self-glorification, still, as I can manage without doing so, I can afford to play with it, and sketch, compose, or paint, just as I have a fancy for it. All in that book there by you," said he, "are composition sketches, designs, I may say—I have rather a weakness that way, as you know, Archie—from odd things you have told me one time or other, hunting incidents, and bits of scenery, and different effects that you have thought worth notice as you have come across them when you have been out with the hounds. What is your woodland bit, as good as Vernon's?"

"Yes," said Archer; "better in some respects, as embracing more; as the wood we met at lies upon a hill, and you have from there a long look up the valley as well as over it, with its rich flat meadow-land and its hop-yards and orchards, that edge up the hills from the river. And between the little coppices and covers that lie in the hollows, you get," said he, "strips of sheep pasture and gullies, where the deep drips that come down through the big woods, and line them with shadows, widen out into the valley, and empty their rills into the brooks and the river."

"Good for some sketching?" said Johnson.

"Yes, very good," was the reply. "I saw many bits," said Archer, "that would come well; but none better

than from the wood, where there was a good foreground of briars and bracken, and some famous ragged turf with some grays and browns about it, a width of it, and some sheep there, nibbling at the soft green turf that was by it, where the hill sloped down to the dingles. Talk of ferns, old fellow," said Archer—"well, you know those that were in that 'Summer Noon' that was in the Academy, where in the left-hand corner of the picture you got that glorious reflected light through the taller ones—quite liquid colour—that ran about the moss the ferns came out of, like the lights that flicker about a garden walk. I saw lots of it there, splendid! All down the sides and shoulder of the hill the turf is covered with ferns, so high and strong that they scrape your boots," said he, "as you ride through them; and as they are just now turning from gold to russet, you may fancy their colour where the light comes through them! The greens too were magnificent; sloping to wooded hollows and ravines. I wish you had been there," said Archer; "such great grand masses, all autumn-tinted, growing above an underwood waist-deep in ferns, and shadowed by big boughs, that looked as if they were the growth of years, and had sheltered them for a century. And in an open glade between the trees, where it was sunny, there were some figures—women at a spring, and children blackberrying—that, as they moved about, gave useful colour and nice contrasting form just where it was wanted."

"Good distance?" said Johnson.

"Yes; and mid-distance. Judge for yourself. I call it so," said Archer. "A level country lying between hills, high, vast, and wooded; with farms and homesteads, and with ricks and cottages; and a gray river that was willow-fringed, and showed white at the weirs, where it tumbled over by the mills, and white again on the fords, where the sun caught it as it wound lazily along over the blue of the shallows, and the indigo-green of the woods, rippling along to the steel-tint below it, where it was in shadow from a rain-cloud. And beyond it," continued Archer, "were purple breadths of heath and yellow stubbles, and ruddy-looking fields above the meadows, with teams at plough there, and with wreaths of smoke drifting across them from some burning weeds."

"Scutch, probably," said Johnson; "it gives those

long low trails that are so useful. A good mid-distance for a picture, Archie."

"Yes; but the hilly distance was still finer," said Archer, "swept as it was by cloud-shadows, from a rainy sky far up the valley, where the hills, range on range, rose into the darkness of it, and closed the view. The distance citywards was also good, fine indeed, as I saw it," said he, "under an atmosphere that blued it over and softened it, and that gave a nice mistiness to the tall poplars and the square clumps that led the eye on to the hamlets and the villages and the city; where the high spire and the cathedral tower pierced the pall of smoke that lay there. And beyond it," said Archer, "was haze, then hills, a long and lofty range that was varied in outline, and deep blue in the hollows, and sunlit at the top, the lights shifting as we looked, and fronting a still further range, high too and wooded, that melted into distance miles away, under a sky all thin blue-gray and cloudless."

"By Jove," cried Johnson, "what a place for pictures!"

"I thought you would say so," said Archer. "We will go there, old fellow, when the warm days come in spring, and then you can paint a bit while I pick primroses. The woods all round there are full of them, and the paths are bordered with their yellow blooms, which, mixed as they are with the blue and white of the violets and the wild hyacinths, the woods then are certainly worth seeing, I can tell you," said Archer.

"I will try a picture there," said Johnson, "'The Woods in Spring.'"

"They are worth it," replied Archer, "as you will say when you see them. Well, from this wood we went away directly and straight for our country, as good luck would have it, as the Manor Wood is the boundary of the Hunt, a neutral cover, and we reached the Rough at the bottom," said Archer, "and ran through it, many of us having to lead over there, for there were nasty bits about, and thence to Cruckstone Gorse—a holding place, Johnson, where a second fox was moved and the pack divided, and so split the horsemen. Will, however," said he, "with some difficulty got the hounds together again, and cantering on, he laid them on the line. Hunting it every inch

for half a mile, they owned it with a burst, then went away straight across country up to Quatford Top, where he soon was viewed, tearing along a grass piece three fields on. But as the pace, as you may suppose, was now too good for breathing-time, the potterers were thrown out; so that it gave the hounds a chance, and cleared the way for those who meant to go. For the next three miles or so," said Archer, "Fred and I had our fences together, neither of our horses making one mistake—he rode the chestnut, I was on the bay—until we got the brook, a clipper—Barford Brook, which, as it is bushed by withies nearly all the way, requires some doing, and throws you out of stride. I always like water on the swing," said he, "as the pace lands you; but when you have to turn your horse about, Johnson, and pound him at it, he knows what's coming, and will then refuse, unless he is a water-jumper. I got it just right," said Archer, "straight between the trees; but the chestnut mare would not have it, so Fred got stuck. However, by dint of spur he at last got her over, but, dropping soft, she fell, and when he got her up he found her lame—wrenched, I expect," said Archer. "So, as I said, he left, and I went on. But it lost me time," said he, "and the hounds were at check when I reached them. Will tried back and cast round, but it was all of no use; so making sure that the fox had gone to ground in some unstopped earths a little farther on, they fixed to draw afresh rather than wait and dig."

"And where did you go to then?" said Johnson.

"To Grantham Woods," said Archer; "a splendid country, and a fox for certain. George Brooks, our break-neck rider, rode up then—you know him, Johnson. 'Are you for Grantham, John?' said he. 'I am,' I said. 'I shall not go, for one,' said George; 'they'll never find.' 'We found the last time,' I replied, 'when it was a fixture.' 'Yes,' said he, 'that you might do when you meet there, but not, John, when you come there from another quarter. Leadenhall-market is well-known to all, and so are its foxes! What was your run last time?' said George, 'a straight and good one? Hang such old ringers dodging round the cover; their stiffened limbs know not an inch of country! When next you chop there—"chop" is the word,' said he, 'for there is no run in them—get, if you can, the handling of his carcass; if you don't find,

on roughing-up his coat, seeds from the chaff-bag, why, John, I'm a Dutchman! A bagman I can swear to anywhere,' said George, 'and so can hounds, who will turn their noses up and scarcely eat him. If I go hunting, let it be for something; none of your galloping about the rides,' said he, 'with spurts into a neighbouring field or two, but straight away, the country stiff and strong, and with fences big enough to weed the ruck, and give us room to move—hounds room to go. I am not a tailor-swell,' said he, 'to join a meet for well-cut coat, neat cords, and natty boots, and at the first stiff bit we get sneak home again. Meaning to go, John, give me the chance to find, and I will ride a distance; but here,' said he, 'there's none; so I shall save my mare and save my time. But I am keeping you, I see; they are on the move. Great luck, old boy! If you should win the brush, just shake the seeds out!' And so he left."

"Then do they," Johnson said, "have bagmen there?"

"Bagmen!" said Archer, "no; nor did they ever have them; but George likes pace, and when he does not get it, 'Bag fox!' cries he. It's laughable."

"You don't go with the old squire's harriers, do you?" said Johnson, throwing his dun cow slightly into shadow to tally with the rain-cloud overhead.

"Sometimes," said Archer, "as it is a first-rate pack and he is a good fellow, that is if I have a young horse that I want to teach, or if the meet is far; though to my thinking that 'thistle-whipping' is a tame affair, though I don't mind a by-day now and then with them, Johnson, when—say in March—some old jack hares will go as straight as foxes. We had a very straight thing from the Hall meadows last season, but, as a rule, it's ring, ring, ring all day, and pick and choose at every fence you come to; still you do see all the hunting, but with foxhounds the pace prevents it. But I like a swing and pace," said he; "not time to look—a run that makes you, Johnson, if you are to see it, go straight as pigeons and as swift as swallows; that gets your steam up and well warms your blood, and rouses all the mettle that is in you—you and your horse! That is the sort of hunting," said Archer, "that I like, old man. With hounds like ours, that can fly their fences and spring like greyhounds, it is sport indeed!"

"Was Palmer out?" said Johnson,

"Yes, he was," said Archer, "along with Causer, and well-mounted too, on a rare good-looking one, that champed his bit and flung his flakes of foam while trotting on the turf beside the hounds, bringing his legs well under him at every stride. A small and well-bred head and good bang tail, set on just as it should be—a nice horse altogether," said he, "and a fencer, that pricks his ears as he nears the leap, just like a hunter, and lets his rider pull him well together. I saw him do some rails," said Archer, "in first-rate style, most clean and steady—some four-barred ox-rails, five feet high at least, and nearly six if taken at the uprights—three to a length—so close together, and with no 'give' in them! Were not the price a long one, I should buy him—three fifties, for I asked it, and he is cheap at the money," said Archer. "However, I must be content, for my last purchase—that brown horse—carries me splendidly. Wells tried him when I was up there, and liked him too. He is a good horse, Johnson."

"And what has Causer now?" said Johnson. "He seldom mounts well."

"Oh, nothing much," was the reply. "A slashing-looking one, but middling pace—a soft one, I think," said Archer, "for he was soon pumped out in that run on the plough the other day. I doubt his judgment."

"There then, Archie, I think that comes better," said Johnson, looking with his head aside at the blue bits he had scumbled in the picture, rifling the sky, and so improving it. "What as to Grantham?" said he; "what sort of a country is it?"

"Oh, beautiful!" was the reply; "all hill and dale, with great woods that are scored by ravines, and with old quarries and gullies in them, and lots of tumbling water. One dell, or rather a deep glen, that we rode through was very fine; the hills rising on either side of it to a great height, and cutting the sky with their greensward, green to the top of them."

"But we did not find there," said he, "though the hounds drew it carefully; so we went on down into the dingle, a most tangled place, and there, picking our way over the broken ground and the brushwood, and poking about through the gorse and ling, and under the sprays and boughs, we found a wide brook that was

brawling through the bottom, and dashing its foaming flakes on boulder stones, and on great rough slabs that had been washed down there from the quarries by the floods in the winter. A famous bit for a picture, Johnson," said he, "and full of colour; for just above the brook there was a mass of red rock that jutted into it, and that was stained with some old gray moss and lichens, and half-shadowed by the long purple sprays of the boughs that hung over it.

"And ferns sloped up from it," said Archer, "banks of them; most glorious ones, Johnson, growing luxuriantly, and shoulder high, in all the beauty of their autumn tints; most splendid studies! And up still higher, and nearly black—so deep was the green of it—was a wide-spread backing of some grand old yews, edged with the berries of the mountain-ash, that hung in tangles there, with feathery birch.

"Then, as we went onwards," said he, "we found a landslip that had pushed the brook out and turned its course, and so made a waterfall. A fine point as we saw it," said Archer, "with a rift of blue sky high up through the trees, over the white of it. And riding behind the hounds for some distance along the brook, we saw lots of material and any quantity of good things, passing great dock-leaves, both cup-like and spread out, the very things, old man," said he, "for foregrounds for you, whole beds of them, by pebbly shallows, and lots of hemlock that was grown to a giant size, and water-herbage. Rare studies, Johnson.

"We will go there some time with the blocks and sketch them; they are very fine. We also passed by many calm still pools," said Archer, "out of the current, where the banks had burst; and in their bottle greens and browns, beneath the reflections of the bladed grass, were speckled trout, that made us long to stay a bit and fish there."

"Well, let us go there some day soon," said Johnson.

"We will," said Archer. "After a mile or so of watery-way, that cooled the horses' feet and made hounds fresher, a narrow pathway coming from the top ran by the brook, and so gave elbow-room, which we were glad of, as it saved us pressing the boughs back as we went along there, which we all had to do all up the brook, it was so overgrown. Being thus able to push along a bit, we quickened our horses' pace, and went on through the glen to the end of it,

the hounds 'drawing blank,' the road as we made our way there, getting darker," said Archer, "from some dense plantations of firs, beech, and oak.

"Turning a corner, under hanging trees, a burst of light disclosed a lengthy meadow, bright-green and sunny, sloping down gently to the valley under, and brightened by the scarlet of the coats and by the dappled hounds then trotting over it—a picture, Johnson."

"Yes," he replied. "Well, how does mine come now?"

"Oh, very well," said Archer, looking at it. "It is much improved. I see you have 'stopped' that light; it is all the better for it."

"Well, while we watched the long cloud-shadows," continued Archer, "that were stealing slowly across from where the shadows of the glen fell on the meadow, and saw the lighter shades float on over the darker ones, to blot out, as they went, bright bits of colour, spotting the green with gray, a shout of 'Gone away!' and sound of horn, changed all our thoughts to the huntsman and the hounds."

"You found at last, then?" said Johnson.

"We did," said Archer. "A man out ploughing there beyond the meadow had seen a fox steal quietly away; so as we came in sight he signalled to us. So Warne at once," said he, "galloped with cap in hand to where he stood, cheering the hounds on as he went along.

"I seed him," said the fellow, 'cross that field theer, and go by that big oak through that theer hedge, making for them big covers on the hill. He's twenty minutes gone.' 'Was it a sheep-dog that you saw?' said Will. 'It warn't,' said he. 'I'd know a fox from a ship-dog any day. I'se seed 'em often; you git your hounds on if you want to catch him, for when he passed he looked as fresh as paynt.' So on we went," said Archer.

"As the ground was moister there, seemingly from rain that had not reached us, the hounds soon had their noses down and owned the scent, which, as it mended on the grass lands, it dropped the pickers," said he, "for it gave us pace. The way hounds went," said Archer, "looked so like a kill, that each man rode as if he booked the brush. Through wood and thicket, and prickly gorse and copse, the pack were so resolute that they dashed on without a pause, and raced mile after mile over turf and fallow-field.

"At last," said he, "they viewed him making for some sheep under a hedgerow, where they were huddled up together. With one wild scream from Will to spurt them on, they lengthened out and strained their very hearts, good hounds, to kill him.

"In three more fields they flung themselves upon him, and rolled him over down into the ditch.

"A fifty-minutes' run—five up—I one," said Archer. "A right good fox!—no 'bagman' that is certain; so George, you see, was 'out' for once, old man.

"So there's chapter and verse for you," said Archer; "so shut up the painting now, Johnson, there's a good fellow, and let us have a row on the river. We will go across the racecourse to the ferry, and take a boat from there. It is a jolly day, and we shall enjoy it."

"Well, wait ten minutes," said Johnson, "and I will be with you; and then we will pull up to Holt and have a look at the swans."

"Agreed, old man; so stir yourself," said Archer.

CHAPTER IX.

A GHOST IN THE OPEN—GRIFFIN IN THE GRIP.

"Who was the new man you were talking to to-day, Dawson? The fellow goes well."

"The one on the bay do you mean?"

"Yes, a sharp-looking little customer, who seems to have all his eye-teeth about him."

"Oh, that was 'little Jemmy,' to be sure, Jemmy Griffin; a very old friend of mine, and once a neighbour."

"What, did he ever live in these diggings?"

"Yes, for two or three years; but it was before your time. You had not come here then; and he is now on a visit at Beckley. He is coming here, by the bye, to-morrow, Fred; and if you will come too, and help us out with a hare and a brace of birds, at four sharp, you will find him, I think, a very decent fellow."

"Thanks," said King; "he is good across country, that's certain."

"Yes, he is," said Dawson; "but when I first knew

him, he was as great a 'tailor' as you ever saw, and had positively no hands or seat."

The speakers were young Harry Dawson, gentleman farmer, and Fred King, gentleman at large, the only son of a wealthy landowner, by whom he had been indulged from quite a boy, and who still gave him nearly all he asked for; the locality, the interior of an old manor-house—Dyneley Court—in Herefordshire; and the time, the evening of a hunting day in November, when King, who lived near there, at the Pool House, and who often looked-in in the evening for a gossip, and had been out that day with Dawson, settled himself in an easy-chair before the fire, and talked of the day's "run," and kindred topics.

"Who put him in the way of it?" said he.

"Well, in a measure, I did," said Dawson; "for, as I could not," said he, "ride with a fellow in that form, I just 'grassed' him—a few soft ones, Fred, and one rattler—to get his hands down, and fit him to the pigskin, and he has gone very fairly ever since. We met in rather an odd sort of way. I don't know if ever I told you of it?"

"I think not," said King; "the name seems new to me."

"It was when the governor was alive," said Dawson; "one day somewhere about this time five or six years ago. I know we were busy wheat-sowing. We had the hounds here. They brought a fox from Cherwood, one of our outlying fixtures, as I think you know, Fred, and crossed the water, and ran him up the meadows and over the plough and through the orchards, and away for Hampton. We watched them—for being busy I had not," said Dawson, "been with them—out of hearing and over the hills, when, 'Harry lad,' says the governor, 'just go round the fences, will you, and look them over; and Jem here shall take some trous and hetherings to fill the gaps, if you find that there are any; and count the sheep again as you come back. There may be some strayed if they have left the gates open.' So I went," said Dawson. "'Well, Fred,' said he, 'scarcely was I out of sight of the old man—in fact, I was but just past the sawpit—when I heard a most awful howling and scream on scream. Knowing that Jane Callow's youngsters were out that way, getting in some fern we had cut for her for litter, I hurried on, thinking they had got a snake, or a snake had got them—

there are lots on the common, you know, and in those hedges—and that there was no time to lose; so getting over the gate into Perryfield, and making for the noise, there the children were,” said Dawson, “sure enough, cowering under the hedge and screaming lustily. ‘What is the matter with you?’ I said, ‘you young varmints!’” continued Dawson. “‘What are you making that noise for? You will frighten the whole parish!’ ‘Oh, sir; please, sir; the ghost, sir!’ was the sobbing reply, given in the native dialect, which, as you know it too well, Fred, I will not,” said he, “inflict upon you; ‘it’s there, sir; in the hedge, sir; please, sir’—sob, sob. Looking where they pointed, there certainly was something white there—orthodox colour for ghosts, I thought,” said Dawson; “and also on the move, as though the apparition had its back up, and was stealing along the hedgerow to get away unnoticed. Quieting the miserable little imps, I went towards it,” said he, “and there, in the corner, caught in the brambles, was some light-coloured garment, bulged by the wind and surging in the breeze. Bending forward to hook it up, the confounded thing gave a groan, and then a second, more piteous than the first.”

“The deuce it did!” said Fred, as he looked rather wild about the eyes.

“Fact,” said Dawson. “Now I am not a nervous man myself, Fred; but I must say I did not then wonder at the youngsters’ noise, especially when, amidst some more unearthly sounds, I heard—now don’t get nervous, old fellow; I see your hair is beginning to rise—right under my very feet, and below the ground, and said in the most sepulchral tones possible—steady, Fred, it’s coming—very sepulchral indeed, Fred—the stern command to ‘Get me out; get me out!’”

“By Jove!” said King.

“Well, here was a fix,” said Dawson. “Who was ‘me,’ ghost or human? Jumping over the cutting on to the bank, I peered into the next field. Nothing there; looked all round—still nothing; yet the groaning and the moaning continued. Thinking, all at once,” said he, “it might be that fool of a fellow Biscoe ‘on for a lark,’ I sang out—‘Oh, you need not think I was frightened, Fred,’” said Dawson—“‘Come, Master Jemmy, you get out of that, or I will make you; none of your nonsense, you great stupid.’”

‘But I cannot get out,’ was the reply. ‘Is it really you, Jemmy?’ I said, scarcely recognising his voice, and thinking,” continued Dawson, “I had seen him down in the hop-yard before I started. ‘Yes, it is,’ was the reply. ‘Are you sure?’ said I. ‘Did your godfathers and godmothers give you that name?’ ‘Yes, yes, I tell you, I am Jemmy; and as you seem to know me, why do you let me lie here underground? I am in a coffin; a perfect coffin.’”

“What did you think when he said that—‘in a coffin’?” said King, as he felt his scalp creep.

“Why, with no Jemmy to be seen above ground, to tell you the truth,” said Dawson, “I did not know what to think. Accident, however,” said he, “soon solved the mystery, luckily for Jemmy; for in jumping back off the bank I stumbled,” said Dawson, “and, pitching forward, fell into the field, with my legs hanging over the cutting. ‘Let me catch hold of your legs,’ said a voice under me—just fancy, Fred, right under me.”

“By Jove!” said King again.

“‘No you don’t,’ said I, as I whisked them out; ‘not if I know it;’ and up I scrambled,” said Dawson. “But to make a long story short,” said he, continued moanings and groanings induced me, after again listening, to push the briers aside—they had been pressed down by something—and to look into the cutting; and there at the bottom of it lay, cruddled up, not a veritable ‘ghost,’ but an apparition of flesh and blood.

“‘Why, how in the name of all that is horrible did you get there?’ I cried with astonishment.

“‘I was thrown here,’ was the reply.

“‘Who threw you here?’ I asked.

“‘Charley.’

“‘What Charley?’ said I.

“‘Old Charley.’

“‘And where is he gone, the rascal?’

“‘Over the hedge—he jumped it.’

“‘How long ago?’ I inquired. ‘Perhaps we may catch him.’

“‘Oh, half an hour or more,’ was the reply; ‘it must be, I know.’

“‘The scoundrel,’ I muttered, as I thought,” said Dawson, “of our one rural policeman, Timmings, and the

propriety of at once sending for him. 'What could have been his motive?'

"'Oh, he wanted to get rid of me, I suppose.'

"'So it seems,' I said. 'However, the first thing to be done is to get you out of this, and to see to you, and then we will try if we cannot run him down. It is impossible,' said I," continued Dawson, "'that he can have got far by this time. I will soon have you out, old fellow, when I can get this pole from the hedge for you to hold by.'

"'I fear he has,' was the remark; 'for he went off on the gallop.'

"'Did you say "gallop"?' I asked, utterly astonished. 'Oh yes, I see,' said I, 'an idiom for pace. How shall we know him if we come up with him?'

"'He has a white mark down the face,' was the reply; 'a blaze.'

"'Just so,' I said. Another idiom, I thought, for burn. It leaves a white mark," said Dawson, "as you see, Fred, by my hand; that is seamed from a burn I had three years ago.

"'And a stripe down the shoulder.'

"'Ah! where you hit him,' I remarked.

"'No,' said he, 'where he was hurt when a colt.'

"'Oh yes, very good; when he was a youngster, you mean,' I said, laughing. 'A provincialism.'

"'Yes, when he was a youngster—a two-year-old.'

"'And what else,' I asked, 'has he, that we shall know him by if we catch him?'

"'A big bang tail,' said he.

"'Why, what on earth are you talking about?' I said. Poor fellow! Slight concussion and wandering; evidently hit on the head, thought I. This must be seen to. 'Confound the pole, will it never come out?' I said, as I kept on trying," said Dawson, "to drag it from the hedge to help him out with it.

"'Hi, you frightened brats!' I shouted to the youngsters, who were too terrified," said he, "to quit the field without me; 'cut away this minute and be off up to the house; now, quick, and bring the men. A man in the grip, tell them, and to bring some picks—and hi, here! a ladder too. Now, don't forget the ladder! Run all the way. He is off his head,' I muttered, 'clear enough. "A

big bang tail," indeed. "Old Charley" with "a tail!" That is good, though.'

"'I shall be off my head very soon if you don't hurry,' said he. 'Confound it all, I mean my horse, old Charley—why, lots know Charley!'

"'O-o-oh!' I almost whistled, 'I see where you are now. You were one with the hounds, then, across here just now?'

"'Of course I was,' said he.

"'And have come to grief?' I said.

"'Can't you see I have?' said he.

"'Yes, yes, of course. How very stupid! I wonder I did not see it,' I replied.

"'I wonder too,' said he; 'but get me out, and we'll talk afterwards. I can't be in this form much longer.'

"'Are you hurt?' I asked," said Dawson.

"'I think so,' he said, 'for I am in great pain; but I am so wedged in here and doubled up, I cannot tell what is the matter with me till I feel my feet a bit.'"

"What a situation for him to have been in!" said King.

"It was," said Dawson. "'Well, cheer up, old fellow,' I said," continued Dawson, "'and we will soon have you out of it now;' for I could find the long fir-pole I had been tugging at—put there, Fred, to bar the cattle—was giving, and I should soon have it. 'Here!' I called to him, as I dragged it out, 'try to catch hold of this, will you, and I will help you up with it?' And with that I passed it down into the grip—one of our backwater cuttings, Fred, that is straight and narrow, and eight feet deep at least—a 'grip' to him. But it was of no use," said Dawson, "for I found that the least exertion was too much for him; and I at once saw that he was badly hurt. 'Never mind,' said I, 'old man. Keep quiet; we will try again directly. I have sent up to the house, and the men are coming. All right, here they are,' I said. 'They are only two fields off, so they won't be long; and I see they have a ladder and some picks with them. You won't be there much longer, that's one comfort.'

"'It is indeed,' he said; 'for I have been here long enough, I think. It is a blessing you found me.'

"But the ladder," said Dawson, "we found useless; so we went to work at once and dug down to him, taking a

slant from six feet off or so, right to the bottom of the cutting. The thing then," said he, "was how we should get him up the slant, now that we had cut it. However, we solved that difficulty by digging round him, just for elbow-room, and then working upwards, making the slope into steps by ridging it. And so," said Dawson, "we landed him, and let him lie a while to get his breath, and gave him a drop of brandy that he said we should find in a flask in his pocket, as he had once saved a man's life in the hunting-field through having it; so since then he had never come out with the hounds without it."

"How was that?" said King.

"I did not ask him then," said Dawson; "but he told me afterwards—one day after he had got about again. A fellow got sent against a tree when hounds were in cover; and he got such a whack on the heart through it that it knocked the wind out of him, and nearly settled him, and 'Jemmy' brought him to with the brandy."

"A capital thing for emergencies," said King; "but, like fire," said he, "though a good friend, it is a bad enemy."

"So the doctor remarked," said Dawson, "and that it was a pity people would not see it in that light. It would not have helped Jemmy there though he had it; for he was too closely wedged to get at it. But when we did get him out it was of use to him. And then," continued Dawson, "when his faint was over, we hoisted him—four of us—on our shoulders, and carried him gently to the house. And after he had come round, and we were able to let him talk a bit, we learned his name, and found he was the person who had taken Lingens—Lingens it was at that time, at least; but he altered the name of it to the Sycamores. You know it," said he, "by the cover; and he was then over seeing to repairs and improvements."

"And he soon," said Dawson, "altered the look of the place; and people about there said, 'That new man, Griffin, seems to have some taste;' and so he had," said he. "The wood-yard that was at the side of the house he put behind, and made in its place a lawn and croquet-ground; and where there was a duck pond that was greened all over beneath the windows, he soon had sloping turf and flower-beds; and what with filling here and cutting there, he made a pretty garden round the house; and by judicious thinning of the trees about it, he got some peeps of blue

distance through them, and glimpses of the river in the meadows. 'The moat,' said Dawson, "he also filled up, and made a drive there, turning the water through the back of the shrubbery—where it was planted out—and dropping it down through the garden, over some ledges edged with ferns and rockery; and then, cutting away the fence at the end there, he tumbled it over into the old quarry, and so got a waterfall, that with its picturesque surroundings of red rock, and broom and gorse, and hanging bushes, made a nice point, and came well as you looked up at it from the rustic bridge that he threw over from the bottom of the grounds to the ash-bed, where the stream flowed away to the river through the dell and the dingle, where he had winding walks and seats; and a most jolly place it was, too, on a summer evening," said Dawson, "as you may suppose, Fred."

"I should think so," said King, "but I have never been there, though I have often passed it and noticed the out-buildings."

"Yes," said Dawson, "those he dressed up; he edged them all with barge-boards, as you see them, and planted the ivy that covers them, and topped them with that dovecot."

"He must have spent a lot of money, then, inside the house and out of it," said King.

"He did," said Dawson; "I wish he could have stayed."

CHAPTER X.

OLD JOHN, AND HOW IT HAPPENED.

"WELL, as I was saying," resumed Dawson, "we got him to the house, and luckily the doctor was at hand, at one of our cottages up the road; killing time there till he was wanted by a workman's wife, who had sent for him; so that we soon got help.

"'Two ribs upon the right and one on the left side are broken, if not crushed,' said the doctor, after he had examined him; 'and he is badly bruised and shaken; he must be kept very quiet, and not talk; and do not let him exert himself in the least, or it may go hard with him. Much depends on that, remember! Give me some flannel,

please,' said he, 'and I will put it on as well as I can; but it must be lightly for the present, until we see what symptoms show themselves.'

"I thought, doctor,' said I," continued Dawson, "'you always did them up tightly at once; they bound me up pretty tight, I know, when I got a rattler out hunting once.'

"I dare say they did,' said he, 'and so should I do now in this case were I clear about it. Where the fracture is a simple one, straight through, Dawson, it is plain sailing; but the case is different when they are crushed or badly broken, and a tight bandage would only add to the mischief. You see, it is this way, Dawson,' said he: 'unless it is a clean fracture, you get sharp edges; and if you press those sharp edges in upon the lungs, you get inflammation from the irritation of it, and sometimes hæmorrhage, that is often fatal; and it is not unlikely, even as it is, that we may get inflammation in this case; so we will make sure,' said the doctor, 'as we can soon tighten it if no symptoms occur of any moment. He is to have nothing, mind, but slops, and to be kept quite quiet. I will look in again,' said he, 'in a few hours, and see how he is.'

"So having made him as comfortable as he could," said Dawson, "he went back to the cottage; calling again as he rode by in the evening, when the woman—Mrs. Smith—was able to release him.

"By gom, sir,' said Smith, as he brought the news, 'it be twins! I dunna know how I shall ever bear it.'

"Poor wretch!" said King.

"The doctor found him easier for the mixture—we had started Smith off," said Dawson, "with the prescription, as he was poking in the way—and so he soon left us, repeating what he had said as to slops and quiet. We had sent in the mean time, and unknown to Griffin, to his mother's place," said Dawson, "the Grove, down in the hollow at Deepdale Brook, where Moore now lives; and we had also despatched a man or two to try to find the horse, and bring with them, if they could see it, that white mysterious thing that was caught on the hedge, and which I had quite forgotten and left there; a garment, by the bye, that proved," said Dawson, "to be an old white mackintosh, which, coming off as he fell into the grip, got caught by the briers, and lodged there. On the man's return from

the Grove," he continued, "he found there was no one there but servants, as Mrs. Griffin and her daughters had gone—November being a dull month with us—for three weeks to some friends in Warwickshire—the Flemmings of Kenilworth. As it was of no use," said he, "spoiling their pleasure by bringing them home, and as more than servants' care was needed for him, we with difficulty persuaded him to remain with us, for a few days at least. Begging we would not communicate with his people, his mother having heart-disease, and sending again to the Grove to impress the same upon the servants, he accepted the situation, and was very patient.

"Poor fellow," said Dawson, "he had a stiff time of it, though; for inflammation of the lungs did set in, and we had then to write to his friends, as he was very bad with it, and we did not at that time know how it might end. Of course we found them nice people; a wee bit old-fashioned," said he, "but very pleasant and ladylike. When able to be moved with safety, they had him with them; and from that time to this," said Dawson, "we have been great friends."

"How came he to leave this quarter?" said King.

"For one thing," said Dawson, "the house was damp; the pool and the moat had been there too long, I expect; and for another, and the main reason, he came into some property by the death of an uncle; and so gave up farming as being no longer necessary. His mother and sisters, though, still spend a part of the year with him, at his place, the Woodend—up for the Ludlow country; and the rest of the year at Bath and Malvern, with a month at the sea in the summer."

"Did you capture the animal?" said King.

"Yes," said Dawson; "they found the brute quietly grazing three fields off, with the reins round his legs; and he came with them as gently as a lamb."

"Then he was not a vicious wretch?" said King.

"Oh no," was the reply; "but an ugly beast with a great coarse head, and an amount of jaw that looked like pulling.

"Some one who had been kind enough to tutor Jemmy, had, it seems, told him when he was coming to a big place, to 'put the steam on, sit back, loose his head, and let him have it.' He did so," said Dawson, "and he did 'have it;'

for, mistaking the word 'loose,' he so slackened his curb while going a fizzer for the fence, that 'old Charley,' who really could jump, and would have cleared the lot, or have done it 'on and off,' was sent with a bang against the bank, and turned over into the next piece; Jemmy coming to grief in the process, and falling through the briers into the grip."

"I see," said King.

"Had not I found him," said Dawson, "he might have stayed, ay, and remained, there for days; for we were seldom round that corner, as we did not then turn sheep there; and the place itself was so completely covered, by the briers not rising after he went through them, that had he been unable to cry out, we might actually have passed the place a score of times without seeing him; and doubled up as he was, closely wedged, he could not very well have helped himself."

"That's certain," King said.

"Since then, however, we have had many a good day together, and he can now ride, as you have seen," said Dawson, "to hounds with any man; and but for that 'ghost' in the open and Griffin in the grip, I should have missed knowing a very jolly fellow, and my sisters a nice family."

"The memorable garment he still preserves; it hangs in his sanctum, marked 'In memoriam,' and it certainly was instrumental in saving his life—it was more," said Dawson, "it was the cause of it; for had not the wretched thing caught as he fell, no 'ghost' would have been seen, no screams heard, and no help given. Case of Q.E.D., old fellow, plain as your hat—hence the relic."

"Mary," said Dawson, calling to the servant, as he finished telling King all about the 'ghost,' "is that old John's voice that I hear out there?"

"Yes, sir," said the girl; "he's been down at the clerk's, and has just called in, sir."

"Then tell him to sit down a bit," said Dawson, "and draw him some cider, and bring in supper."

"Would you like to go out into the kitchen, Fred," said he, as they finished supper, "and have a chat with the old fellow? He is on the settle there in the chimney corner. There is a good fire, I see."

"Yes, if you like," said King.

"He is quite a character, as you are aware, Fred; and now old Mead is dead, he is the oldest man and 'father of the parish.' Come on, then," said Dawson, "while she clears the things, and we will draw him out a bit.

"Well, John," said Dawson, as they went into the kitchen, "and how does the world use you, old man? You're late to-night."

"My duty to you, sir," said John, getting up and pulling his forelock—his smock-frock as white as snow and his cheeks as rosy as a pippin—"Oh, nicely, nicely, thank you, sir. I ates well an' I sleeps well, an' I thank the Lord I can take ma drop o' drink. A taste o' good stuff this now, Mayster Henry; clane i' the mouth. I drinks it to you, gentlemen."

"Thank you, John; don't spare it if you like it. And what has Dovey," said Dawson, "got to say for himself?"

"A mighty little, sir; mighty little. I ha' been a-tacklin' on him, sir, for racin' the parson."

"Racing the parson, John?"

"Is, sir, o' Sundays. I told him it daynt become him. 'Suppose the poor man,' says I, 'was to trip a word, why, you'd be on to him like 'ounds a-huntin', or maybe head him. 'To finish afore the parson,' says I, 'would disgrace the parish.' Not as he's like the old un, sir, Parson Yaxley, as ood let us sleep all the sarmun, so as we didna snore, an' in the winter arternoons, if it were a-snowin', sir, ood send us out a shillin' apiece fro the court-house, and stop hissself theer over his wine, comfortable-like, for us to goo home paceable, like good Christians, as doin' on us more good nor a-settin' to hear him i' the cold theer. 'But, Dovey,' I says, an' as 'feyther o' the parish' I says it, 'he's our suparior, so respects his due; no sarvant ever rides afore his mayster.'"

"Yes, I have heard say the old rector was much liked," said Dawson.

"That he were, sir," said John; "he were mighty good to me, mighty good; that's when I were a boy o' sixteen, sir—a matter o' sixty year agoo now, Mayster Henry, sixty year agoo. Well, sir, you know, my mother—rest her soul, poor ooman—claned the church, an' I helped her, so I were alleys a-'angin' about theer like; an' o' Sundays, arter we'd turned the cushins up an' put the books i' the proper place—i' the font, sir—a good big un that were, sir, as they could

stand 'em up in, not that littler un theyn got now—an' the dusters an' her pattens theer; her other pair, sir, in case o' suddin wet o' Sundays, so as to be pervided-like; a werry thoughtful ooman were my mother, sir—we alleys left the doore open for the week, to make it sweet and clane and fresh-like for sarvice agin, and then locked the gate, to keep the gipsies out.

"But as the fowls could goo in," continued old John, "they did goo in, an' the sheep too, for the matter o' that, when they was turned i' the churchyard; so it were my place, you see, sir, to hunt the eggs up, an' bring him all I could find theer, an'—for he did the thing as was right, sir, an' alleys behaved 'ansum to ma, sir—he used to gie ma a 'apenny apiece all round for 'em, good uns or bad uns."

"Did you get many, then, in the church?" said King.

"Purty well, sir; purty well," said old John; "but if theer'd 'a bin another pilpit, or one o' them three-deckers, we'd 'a done better, sir, for they laid eggs on eggs i' the pilpit."

"I wonder you did not have them come in on Sundays during service," said King.

"So they did, sir, at one time," said he, "an' was alleys welcome; we never meddled ooth 'em, sir, nor mis-lested 'em; but the clerk as they had then—old Thomas Cobb, as is dead and gone, rest his poor soul—had a misfortin, sir, so they was stopped."

"What was that, John?" said Dawson.

"Why, you see, sir," said the old man, "the parson had been a-lect'rin' on him how to gie out the hymns proper-like, and we was to have, o' the next Sunday, 'Hark! the herald,' on the bass viol—that were Joe Timmins—and the flageolet, Edwin Purchas; both on 'em gone now, sir, an' their instruments. An' the clerk, Thomas Cobb, as I said, sir, in gieing of 'em out, were to stop at 'Hark!' an' not on no accounts to goo on wi' the 'herald' till the third 'Hark!' so as like to press the congreation."

"Impress, John," suggested Dawson.

"Perhaps it were, sir," said John. "Well, when he stood up o' the Sunday, sir, he disturbed one o' them fowls, as had been paccable-like i' the desk during prayers, and set him a-flyin' on to the cushin, sir, where 'Cock-a-doodle-do,' says he. 'Hark!' cries Cobb—that were his

first 'Hark!' sir—and looks as wild as two hawks, to think o' the daredness o' the fowl, and under his very nose too, sir. 'Cock-a-doodle-do,' says the fowl again, as bold as possible, and flapping his wings like a fighter. 'Hark!' cries Cobb again—that were his second 'Hark!' sir—fiercer than ever, when, as I sit here on this here settle, sir, the other fowls jines in, an' in two minutes, what wi' the 'chuck-chucks' an' the 'doodle-does,' it were Meg's delight, sir; an' in the middle on it all, sir, while everybody were well-nigh a-bustin', he roars out, savager than ever—bein' obligated-like, sir, to goo on wi' his part—'Hark! the herald angels sing;' an' then flopped back on to his cushin an' disappeared ontirely, as the fowls went at it all at once, as if they meant it."

"That was awkward, however, John," said Dawson, laughing.

"It were, sir," said John, who looked very serious; "for we niver sung it that mornin', arter all, sir. The viol tried it, and the flageolet tried it, but it ony sounded like both instruments a-laffin', sir; an' so the flute an' the fiddle gid in at that, sir; an' then we all luffed, sir, instruments an' all; an' in the midst on it out o' her pew walks the oud squire's housekeeper, as were brought up religious, sir, an' she went an' jined the Methodies that very evenin', sir, on the Green. 'For,' says she, 'I won't sit theer an' have my religion insulted by a parcel o' fowls in that manner.' An' to her dyin' day she would have it, gentlemen both, as how the parson an' the clerk trained them fowls atween 'em; an' that it were all a planned thing to put her about an' fluster her, 'ecos she didna hold good wi' fowls in any way, on account o' their n'ise an' crowin'; an' was alleys a 'drattin' 'em in an' out o' the church an' about the buildin's. So through the crowin' the fowls was druv, an' I," said old John, "lost my 'apence; an' as for her, sir—well, she died a Ranter, as were a judgment on her, through a-slanderin' o' them fowls."

"I wonder you were not clerk, John," said King.

"Well, sir, I niver warn't no scholard," said John, "or I could ha' copt Thomas Cobb, I think, sir; leastways in follerin' the parson in a devout sort o' a manner, and at a respectful distance—as I told Dovey, sir, just now. But feyther didna hold good ooth schoolin'. He said he larnt hisself fro' the Book o' Natur; but I niver seed it, sir,

though I'se heerd folks, that be gentlefolks, a-mentionin' on it; but it were a pictur-book, I know, sir, 'ecos they spoke o' 'the beauties' in it."

"They meant what you see round you, John—the beautiful hills and the woods," said Dawson, "and the green fields and the river."

"Now, did they, sir?" said John, rousing up with astonishment. "Ony to think o' that, now! Ay, there be a good maany o' them things about in this part o' the country, sir, a good maany."

"And the blue sky and the birds, and the buds and the blossoms," continued Dawson.

"Well, I holds good ooth the blue sky, Mayster Henry," said old John, "'ecos that brings the tatures on; an' I approves o' the blossom too, by reason o' it looking like a lot o' cyder about," said he; "but as for them buds and birds, sir, the one takes the t'other, I reckon; leastways them beggarin' sparrers does, sir, as arn't no good to nobody, an' them tomtits. They played the very old un wi' my apercot this time, sir, an' punished the pays dreadful, although I'd stringed 'em an' feathered 'em an' old-hatted 'em."

"Ah, a heart-rending case," said Dawson. "Hold your cup, John. You won't be afraid of a drop more?"

"Niver were it, sir," said John.

"Fill it up for him, then, Mary," said Dawson; "it won't hurt him. Now, Fred," said he, "old John will tell us of his younger days."

"A ool, a ool, sir. This be mighty good cyder, Mayster Henry," said old John, "mighty good."

"Drink it up, then," said Dawson, "and light your pipe, John."

CHAPTER XI.

BURTON OF BOSABEL—INTO THE RIVER, AND DOWN WITH THE FLOOD.

"THEN you really had a good thing yesterday?" said Warden to his friend Burton, as the two bachelor chums sat before the fire, on a chill November evening, in Warden's old-fashioned room at the Manor House, which

was a straggling sort of place, half ivy, and situated in the midst of the hunting covers in Herefordshire, and in the hamlet of Deepdale.

"First-rate, Fred," was the reply; "for they are low-scented hounds, and they suit the woodlands; so if a fox is out, and there is anything like a scent, we are sure of sport."

Warden, who was a friend of Burton, was a young fellow of good family and of fair means; the farm that was attached to the Manor House being a dairy-farm, that gave grazing ground to a large herd of milking cows, hence the cheese and the butter-making there were items of importance; and it was a poultry-farm also, as ready a sale being found in the country town for eggs and chickens, and such-like, as in most places.

The poultry and the pigeon house and the dairy were in a nice cool place by themselves, in a snug part of the shrubbery, and each had an enclosure of its own; and their little ornamental buildings were surrounded by trees, and belted with rhododendrons, crimson and scarlet, that, when they were flushed with colour in the summer, looked well with the white pigeons about them. And the butterwomen, Jane and Martha, went to market twice a week, and in the old-fashioned way too—on horseback, with their butterbags—the cheese and the poultry being always sent on by the carrier.

The two friends, Warden and Burton, lived in adjoining parishes, and near to Archer and Johnson, and they were also within a few miles of Andrews and Oliver; the neighbourhood—as was all that district indeed up the valley—being wooded and beautiful.

And Burton was also a farmer, and about thirty years of age, the same age as Warden; but as he was "better off" than Warden, he kept more horses, for he had more hunting. He also bred horses—good ones; and he took a pleasure in "breaking" them himself, for he was a good rider, and, as we have seen in the cub-hunting, he could "stick" a horse as well as most men.

The name of the place that he and his mother lived at was Boscabel, so named, or rather renamed, by an ancestor, "Burton of Burton," who, being a staunch Royalist, sided with King Charles, and assisted, after the fight at Worcester, to shelter him from the "crop-heads." He paid dearly,

however, for his loyalty, as he had afterwards to "compound" to save his property.

So he set his teeth hard, for he had "the blood of the Burtons" in him; and as soon as it was safe for him to do so, he changed the name of the place from the Warren to Boscabel; and making a new approach to it through the fields, he planted the one side of the road with Scotch firs, and the other with oaks, that at the time of our narrative had grown into a magnificent avenue; the interlacement of their branches, the rich browns of the one and the grays of the other, with the light greens and the gorse-greens of their foliage, making as nice a bit of colour as one would wish to see, especially when the sun shone through it, and brought out the red lights on the fir-boughs, and threw such broad shadows beneath them, that were of such a rich soft green on the grass and so purple on the road, where they lay against the bright bars of sunlight that went slanting across it.

Alongside the avenue—or "the drive," as it was called—were the paddocks, the horses on the one side and the mares on the other. And as most of the colts and some of the hunters there were very fond of coming to the rails, just to have their noses rubbed and be messed with, the walk up there was a pleasant one.

And the old fellow who did the ditching at the farm—old William—was one of a family who had continued to live there, from father to son, from the time it was the Warren—not an uncommon thing in the country, in those places where they care for the labourers—and who therefore never forgot the bit of oak for his hat as the day came round; as he thought it "his dooty, sir," on the twenty-ninth of May, to commemorate the loyalty of the family by wearing the symbol of the king's escape.

And if you met him in the avenue, as you often might do, "doin' a bit o' cuttin', sir, to claime the draanes," he had always his little say ready for you, correct to the letter, "as how the oud master o' all were a man o' quality, sir, a good man an' true; as were put down—though it niver comed off, sir, more's the pity—for a 'Knight o' the Royal Oak' by King Charles, as got up i' the tree at Boscabel, sir, arter they'd druv him fro' Ooster—you might 'a heerd on him, sir?—when that cussed oud Crummil pum-mild him—darn his body!"

Burton, who was called "Charlie" by his friends, and "young Mr. Charles" by the men, though he was the only Mr. Charles now, his father being dead, was much liked in the neighbourhood, as he had money to spend, and he spent it freely; and he had always a word for his workmen, and an eye to their cottages; and if people would only work while they were at it, and put their strength into it, there was always plenty of employment and fair wages for them at Boscabel. And there were those about there who began to think they might have before very long a young mistress at Boscabel, as well as a master; for "had not young Mr. Charles been a good deal at the old squire's of late at Peyton Hall; and warn't there that niece of his there, young Miss Florence, as had the golden hair?" So the two things being incontrovertible facts, the rumour commenced; and, as the sequel will show, rumour for once was right.

Raymond was a neighbour of Burton, and lived at the Firs, the farm adjoining; but he was not, like Charlie, a hunting man.

To return to Warden and Burton, as they were seated by the fire.

"Come in," shouted Warden, in response to a charivari at the door; "you are just in time, old fellow," said he, as Raymond entered—Jack Raymond of the Firs, a very great friend of his—and shook hands with them. "Why did you not drop in to dinner? Find a seat, will you, and bring yourself to an anchor. Pass the wine, Charlie, and produce the trophy."

"Oh, bother the trophy!" said Burton. "He would call it 'a tail,' and ask for 'Zingari!'"

"What tale?" asked Raymond eagerly.

"This," cried Charlie, catching him a dab on the cheek with a fox's brush. "*Crede, crede*, you unbelieving Ish-maelite; *ecce signum!*"

"You don't mean to say you really won that?" said Raymond, with astonishment.

"Don't I? But I do, my dear fellow," was the reply. "*Veni, vidi, vici*; I went and did it."

"Give it out, Charlie," said Warden, "and let us have it; I have not yet heard the rights of it myself. It was a confounded nuisance I was unable to be with you; but it was our Board-day, and I wanted to bring forward the case of one of my men who is under the doctor's hands."

Thus exhorted, Burton settled himself in his chair, stuck the poker in the fire, and proceeded to give them the particulars of "the run from Henley."

"You know the big covers," said he, "near Henley Dingles? Well, making for the upper end of them, we took the outer ride, as the best place for the fair start; and waited there by the yews, amidst the whirl of the pheasants and the crackling of the twigs, as the hounds worked beneath us in the wood—when Parker, who was ahead quietly listening, turned round briskly in his saddle, with 'Hush, you fellows; they have found for a certainty.' And he was right too, sure enough," said Burton, "as a low whimper, deepening into a bay, quickly proved, repeated and responded to, as it was again and again, by the whole pack.

"'Hark! hark to Warrior!' cried Will, as he cantered up, standing in his stirrups, and looking ready to jump out of them. 'Have at him there, my beauties—have at him! There's a fox for a hundred!'

"With a rustle and a rush up the bank, on they came with a crash, and with a jump and a scramble at the top, they left the woods for the open; Will, as their white sterns flickered at the fence, shouting, 'Hold hard now, gentlemen, till they get away; he's right for Brookwood, and we're in for a good un! Come up, old horse. Now, stupid,' said he, as the old horse, getting a thonger, rapped the pleachers in his contempt for 'a four-footer,' 'are you going to say your prayers at starting, you old beggar? Come along, I say!' And waking him up with a touch of the spur and a jib of the rein, he turned the corner of the cover; and then, pounding down a ride, reached the common just as the hounds, running well together, passed over it in front of him. Following in his wake," said Burton, "were Melville, Hardy, Lee, John Parker, Miller, and myself; our horses well in hand, and ourselves ready to cut out work for the best of them. As the hounds half checked and feathered by the pool, Will's whip-hand stopped us; then, as they went on again up the grass-lands for Lilton village, we gave our steeds their heads, and put them to it. For more than twenty minutes, my boys, we had it to ourselves," said he, "hard and fast; for not a soul could live with us; and as we rode together, each on his own line, we took our fences in our stride, and went like pigeons.

"Passing Thriftlands by the shrubbery—you know the swing-gate," said Charlie—"we skirted the gravel-pits, and made for Haines; then bending to the left, we crossed Croome Hill, and went on by the Elms to Tedby, and from thence to the ash-beds, and through the fold at Trew's; and then, with a ring round the outbuildings there, where he failed to effect a lodgment, we pushed him through the brook in the meadows, and put his nose straight for Horton's, the tops of whose kilns we could see before us; the hounds," said Burton, "running at that time almost in view, and with scent breast-high.

"'We cannot stay to try your barland this time, Tom,' said Miller to Sleyford, who had nicked across country, and had just come up with us; 'the pace won't allow it.'

"'No,' was the reply; 'but you shall as we come back, if we do but kill.'

"A good fellow is Tom," said Burton. "Just as we thought the fox had missed the water, and we were right for Brookwood, a sheep-dog made a dash at him, and he went straight for the river like an otter."

"'Confound that!' said Hardy, as the hounds swung round. 'Now, how shall we get over?'

"'Wait, my dear fellow,' till he has crossed,' I said," continued Burton, 'and watch the varmint!'

"'He might swim down the side,' said Lee, 'and then come out again; I have known it happen.'

"'Not he,' said Hardy. 'The one we have up is a straight one, George; there is no mistake about it. Before he hangs a yard he will make his point, you'll see; that is, if hounds will let him, for they are pretty close to him.

"'He is over then, safe enough; look there!' said Hardy. 'That fellow in the field seems going frantic, as if he had not long to live, poor wretch!—quite off his head, that's clear. The first time he has seen a fox perhaps; if so, excusable. Well, gentlemen,' said Hardy, 'we are sold! The water is all out; we are done! Here is off, for one, for home! The hounds are gone, and we can't get over; and if we tried the bridge, they would be so far by then that we should not catch them.'

"So Hardy left," said Burton.

"To know that 'Charley' was over the water, and the pack on good terms with him, was, however, quite enough

for me," said Burton; "the game hounds had a hard struggle to cross, though, so I raced for it and I had it! I stopped the 'field,' swam the river, and got the brush; and here it is, my bonny boys, and a fizzer too!" cried he, as he flourished it above him with a "Tally O!"

"How did you manage it?" said Warden.

"I will tell you," said Charlie. "You know that big pasture piece by Langley Wood, between Horton's and Brookwood, that skirts the hop-yards? As we jumped into it," said he, "the hounds were near, and going at a rattling pace straight for the river, with the confounded sheep-dog ahead of them! Well, we of course knew by the silence of the weir it was then brimful; but to turn for the lanes, as a lot of them were doing, was to miss the finish; so, catching the music of the hounds as they were streaming up the banks, we raced for the withy beds, the miller shouting to us as we neared the mill, 'The water's out and half-way up the wheel; go back!'

"And so it was," said Charlie, "through some heavy weather somewhere up the country aiding the storm we had a week ago; the river rushing by us as red as marl. But that did not matter, for the hounds were on; so his noisy warnings were of no use whatever, at least to me," said Burton; "but that we should be drowned seemed certain to him. There was no need therefore to say that he had not hunted—poor timid wretch!—for he would have had more thought if he had, and have been more reasonable, as the hounds were over."

"But you can't swim," said Raymond, "can you?"

"Not a stroke," said Charlie.

"I wonder you risked it, then," said Warden.

"But could you have stayed, now, Fred, had you been there? No, not a bit of it, I know," said Burton warmly. "The hounds were across, so into it we went, when swish came the water over the saddle-bow, and splash I had it in the eyes; but with a plunge or two forwards, that sent a shower-bath all over us, we were soon in mid-stream, where, caught by the rush of the water, we got swept," said Charlie, "right round the corner by the mill-wheel."

"You mad-brained fellow," said Warden, "it was a mercy you were not drowned, horse and all!"

"You know the old saying," was the reply.

"Lifted by the swirl," continued he, "and swinging

down the river with the flood, we got buffeted by the bushes and bumped against the trees, and we seemed in for a settler plump against the boat-house. Missed, however, by a twist, we grated through the reeds—a nasty bit, as they were under water, big bulrushes, and might have held us—and then we hit the bank, which turned us round and very nearly over, and drove us on against a little island.

“But still there was no chance to land; for the flood, though it got divided there, was far too swift and the bushes too close.

“So keeping her well in hand,” said Charlie, “and her head straight, I sat her motionless, and let her drift to where the river widens past some meadows, and there she steadied; so it was then all plain sailing,” said he. “So letting her float on to get her wind, I bore gently across the stream and slewed her round, and touched the bottom on a sandy shallow, where, dripping as she was, the dear old thing! I let her stand,” said Burton, “to feel her feet a bit and to think it over, I patting her wet neck and talking to her, the darling beauty!

“It was only for a minute, though,” said he; “for with a whinny her head was round and up, and her eyes were bright, and her ears well forwards listening for the hounds, like the good mare she is.”

“A rare mare,” Warden said, “that’s certain, Charlie.”

“She is a clipper, Fred!” said he; “a perfect hunter! She heard them evidently,” continued Burton, “though I did not; for the river’s roar still hung about my ears, it was so loud. Champing at her bit, she began to fret; so I let her then make for an ash-bed, and though it was crumbling stuff and loose and rotten, she scrambled up the bank in a minute, and poked her way between the stubs and branches till we got to the boundary fence, which she then jumped like a greyhound.”

“What a plucky old girl!” said Warden. “Many a mare would have been beaten, driven along by the flood as she was.”

“That’s certain,” said Charlie.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RUN FROM HENLEY—A WET JACKET FOR A WHITE TIP.

"We were near getting a purler, though," continued Burton, "for the drop was a deep one; the place being a holloway, and the spot, as I found," said Charlie, "close by where we met the gipsies the day we were fishing there below the ford."

"I remember it," said Warden.

"Who told our fortunes, and who promised us riches—those dark-eyed girls with whom you had a chatter, and fell in love with for their blue-black hair. Oh, don't deny it," said Charlie; "it was quite excusable."

"Not I, Charlie, but you," said Warden.

"Oh, I know better, Fred," replied Charlie. "I never saw a fellow cut like you were. Sonnets for a month, at least, was what I looked for, on olive skins and wicked hazel eyes."

"Well, seeing then," said he, "the line of country, I put her on the turf, and cantered on to where the hounds had crossed below the mill; when some one shouting out to me," said Charlie, "I looked over the river, and saw Will and Parker by the side of it, pounding along and on a level with us."

"It seems," said Burton, "that when we were swept downwards by the flood, they followed through the gates along the fields to see the ending of it; but finding that when we got beyond the island we steadied, they turned again to get round by the bridge, and so try to catch the hounds, as they knew then that we should not come to grief, at least that journey."

"Though they did have the start of us," said he, "we came in level, as we went by the side of the water, and they had to go round through the gates. 'Come, put the gray in, Warne; don't hesitate, you craven fellow,' I shouted out," said Charlie, "as Will stood looking. 'Below there, where I landed. If you don't flurry him, you will get him over. Come, come on! You'll never see your hounds else all the morning, you stupid fellow; for, all the fresher for the bath they had, they are slick away by now, straight for the hills, and with a blazing scent

Come, come along! Give him a lead, Parker,' I said; 'now, don't be cowards!'"

"They evidently thought discretion the better part of valour," said Raymond.

"I think so," said Burton.

"But," continued he, "'Too deep,' said Will; and 'It's far too swift,' said Parker; 'we shall go down the meadows to the bridge.' 'Three down and three up,' I said, 'just six long miles; so Tally O! my boys. Here's off for hounds. I mean to try to see the run if no one else does, if I can only once drop in with them.'

"Turning her head uphill," said Burton, "I reached the banks as Will and Parker started for the bridge, a longish rounder. Up at the top, a good backing to some cottages, there is a large fir-wood," said he, "Crow Coppice, round which I galloped to the farther end, as from there I knew I could see a long way up the valley, and might spy hounds; and I then drew rein," said Charlie, "to breathe the mare and listen.

"The sweep of country that you get from there is certainly worth seeing," said he; "and I thought of Archer. Had he been with us yesterday, as he hoped to be, I think it would have chained him to the spot; for he is fond of such scenes, as he finds in them more or less of that fine form and colour that he sees in most country subjects, and on which, once give him rein, he likes to dwell. 'I see the hounds,' said he, 'but very little else besides the fences.'

"But he is such a fellow," said Charlie; "he has eyes for all, and seems to see that which most others would be sure to miss; and yet he never fails to keep a good place with hounds. That men do not see all things alike is very evident. A man has eyes for that he thinks most of; not that I cannot 'see' things when they are shown me, but as I go," said he, "I pass them—he observes. And so it is, at least I fancy so, that even on blank days he never grumbles. Quite an enthusiast," said Charlie, "is Master Archer.

"While gently on the move," said he, "I looked and listened; but I could not see the hounds, nor could I hear them, though the wind met me; when, as I had again to check the mare for her impatience, the tiny tinkle of a sheep-bell reached me, like sheep disturbed. And then

some jays flew about from tree to tree, with a cry and a chatter; and sparrows rustled up in the bushes; and some magpies went away, and dropped into an elm-tree in a dingle.

"That looked, I thought, just like a fox afoot, and I wondered how far by then the hounds were with the hunt one; when all at once, not fifty yards ahead, I spied," said Charlie, "the black-tipped nose of Reynard through the hedgerow; then out he jumped, and without looking round, he went off lazily, and reached a drain-hole under some thorns and briers that overhung it.

"I saw it was our hunt-fox by his move, and by the dirty brush that he trailed after him; so I felt that it was all up with him," said he, "and that I was safe for the finish, and his 'white tip' mine. There's a beauty for you," said Charlie, as he held up the brush admiringly; "as fluffy as possible, and as soft as wool. Just feel it.

"Quieting the mare," said he, "who with pricked ears and dilated nostrils trembled with excitement, as she saw the fox and heard the distant challenge of the hounds as they turned towards us—the fox, it seems, was headed—I waited their swing up the valley and their dash through the cover, and then, as they came on bounding over the fence, I capped them to his hiding-place; and with a shout of 'Tally O, away!' I put him up," said Burton, "almost in the midst of them.

"They raced him for a field or two, then tumbled on to him and chopped him. Time, one hour and forty minutes; and he was as fine a dog-fox as you ever saw!

"With a wild 'Who-whoop!'" said he, "I was on my feet, and laying about me lustily; then, lodging the carcass by a lucky fling in a big burr-oak, I coached the hounds off, lit my pipe, and sat down by them, the mare grazing alongside me quietly enough, with Harold and Dauntless sniffing at her heels, and the whole pack baying round her; when, feeling for the first time that I had been in for a good wetting," said Charlie, "and that keeping still would not mend the mare or me, I slipped my arm through the reins, and briskly circled the hounds with her again and again, they continuing to bay and to jump against the tree, in their vain efforts to get at the fox.

"Still no one came," said he, "but a few loafing

labourers, all eyes and dialect; and I scarcely knew how to act, as I did not like to 'brush' the fox, nor did I care to wait. So getting one of the rustics to move the mare about, clear of hounds, I got up in the tree, by using my whip freely; and to my great joy—as I could not have left the hounds—I saw horsemen in the distance, evidently," said he, "thrown out, and on the listen.

"Waving my handkerchief," said Burton, "and shouting for very life, with any quantity of Tally Os and Who-whoops, till you may have heard the hounds' 'bay' for miles, I put them on the move; and by the time I began," said he, "to think that I must either throw the fox down or have the hounds up, Will, Parker, the whips, and a few others, came trotting towards us; they having pounded for the bridge, and been not only completely thrown out, but also, as I was glad to find, the cowardly fellows," said Burton, "in for a regular leg-wetting there in the flood that was over the road."

"You ungrateful imp!" said Warden. "Why, they first of all hindered their own time to see after you, and fish you out if you needed it!"

"Yes," said Charlie, grumblingly; "and so do the coroner out of his fee, and lose the hounds into the bargain. I don't believe in it," said he. "No man ought to hunt unless he can take care of himself; and with hounds going, and a good fox in front of them, nothing should stop him."

"Not even an impracticable fence?" said Warden, who remembered one he himself failed to negotiate a week or two previously.

"No fence whatever," said Burton; "because you can always manage to tumble over it or roll through it if it is too big to jump; and when you are once on the other side of it, why, you can pick yourself up and go on."

"You are a funny fellow," said Warden.

"Chaffing and fraternising," continued Charlie, "we broke up the fox, compared notes, and brought the hounds home; and may I never," said he, as he held up the brush to them, "have a worse finish to a good run than this, my boys, or ever grudge a wet jacket for a white tip. Friends both, I look towards you. Here's 'Our noble selves, and success to hunting!'"

"A good toast: drink it up," said Warden. "More

power to your elbow, my dear fellow. *Palmarum qui meruit ferat*—may the best man win!”

“You will have a large cold over that lot, I should think,” said Raymond.

“Not unlikely; it will have been in a good cause though, if I do,” said Burton.

“Now,” said Warden, “will you two fellows have some more wine?”

“No more for me;” “Nor for me,” they replied.

“Then if you won’t,” said he, “I will ring for coffee.”

Burton and Raymond, whose roads lay together—their farms adjoining—stayed chatting there until the moon was up, so as to have it all the lighter for their walk. Outside the village they came up with Styles—Tom Styles the earthstopper—who was just starting to go up into the woods, with Barnes the blacksmith, to make things safe for the next morning’s hunting; for though the meet was fixed for five miles from there—at Highdown Hill—unless hounds found at once and went away, they would be pretty sure to draw on through the hill-covers, and reach there. So Tom was off on duty with his chum.

As it was a most jolly night, with a nice sniff of frost that made them enjoy it, they turned into the wood along with them; it being in fact, were it not for the time it took to climb it, a much nearer way for them than by road.

Styles was at home, of course, at all times there, and so was the blacksmith, who was a most rank old poacher, and knew each place where they must pick their feet up; but fairly in the wood, Raymond and Charlie Burton both kept stumbling over the drips and ruts, and roots and things, for it was so dark there.

However, the higher they went, the lighter it got; and after staying nearly two hours there poking about the wood with them, and handling the mattocks for the fun of the thing, they left them, to work their way up in the dim light to the old stile at the top of the wood, through the briers and bushes, as all the pathway there had wholly vanished; having dropt into the dingle through a large landslip, that after the great storm a week ago, that set all the brooks on and made waterfalls in the woods, brought down tons of soil into the gullies, considerably astonishing the rabbits, and scaring all the owls and sundry badgers.

It also scared that old witch, Creep, “the charmer,”

who was out there by her hut—a charcoal-burner's—and doing incantations, with notched sticks, for warts, and lovers, fits, things lost, and property, cutting and burying them with mumbled words. She thought her time come, but she touched her charms and shook her beads, and then she sang out “Jacob!” as she made a cross and circle with her crutch; then flopping on her knees, she said “Amen” backwards, ten to the minute, till her breath was gone; and then got up and shook herself, a good one, and turning round three times, rapped her tobacco-box, and so felt better.

Such was at least the tale the keeper told, who was out on the watch there and said he saw her, and that if there was one black cat out with her that night, he knows that he saw fifty. She keeps but five, though; but as perhaps they too were twisting “ten to the minute,” they might have seemed fifty to him.

At length, by climbing over the soil and pushing through the bushes, they reached the stile at the top, and got over it on to the sheep-walk just above the wood, where the hill, flattened at the top, shelved downwards, through gorse and ferns, into a hollow, and then sloped by undulations to a valley, which, taking a crescent sweep, joined further on with the same valley that they had just come out of.

And while they stood there upon the sheep-walk before descending, they could not resist the impulse of exclamation—little as either of them was accustomed to be influenced by impressions of the beautiful—as they saw the whole country round bathed in the moonlight; the Teme beneath them white between the willows, and the meadows silvery where the wood-shadows cut them.

“You will have it fine,” said Raymond, “for the fixture.”

“I don’t know that,” said Burton; “for there is just a trace of halo round the moon, and I can hear the weir, so the wind is this way. The woodpeckers—‘cecles,’ as they call them round here—were on too all the morning, and the sky was low. I fancy myself there will be rain before long, and a good thing too if there is,” said he; “it will help the scent, my boy, and give us all a right good rattling gallop.”

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNSHINE AFTER RAIN—THE STORM AND THE CLEARING.

"WELL, old man," said Archer, looking in at the studio, "I thought I should find you here. Still at work I see, and as busy as ever. How goes the picture? Have you finished it? If the price will suit, I know a customer; and so I thought I would have a ride over and tell you."

"Thanks," said Johnson. "How are you? There is the picture then, 'Storm clearing;' this is for a companion," said he, "'Approaching Storm;'" and Johnson placed the pictures on the easel, side by side. "Do you like them?"

"Yes, very much," said Archer; "they make a tidy pair. Now you have finished that, it looks right well; those cows make quite a point against the blue. I thought they would," said he.

"That is thanks to you, then, for the hints you gave me. How about this one, Archie?"

"A selling-looking picture," was the answer, "and the better of the two, if you don't 'scamp' it. What will the figure be, do you think, for those when framed," said Archer—"twelve ten apiece?"

"No, twelve the pair; that's quite their worth, I'm very sure," said Johnson.

"Well, you know best, but that is far too cheap; I will get him to call and see them when they are finished."

"Had you been here but half an hour ago," said Johnson, "you would have met with Fred, who asked about you."

"What, Collins?"

"Yes, I told him of the ride he missed, through dingle scenery that he is so fond of, and which, as you described it, was worth seeing. He had just come in by train; he has been to Town; but as he wanted to be getting on—he leaves at twelve—he could not stay. If we should go some day," said Johnson, "to see that brook, he has promised he will join us with a block. He is good at umber-work, and black-and-white, but he seldom colours. 'Prout's brown' he swears by."

"Look here, old man," said Archer, criticising; "I

think those figures there are scarcely right; the cows and sheep should all be lying down, not up, as you have got them; I saw and watched the very thing on Tuesday."

"Why, were you not with hounds at Rookwood then?" said Johnson.

"Most certainly I was; but when I am out, and as you ought to know," said Archer, "I have eyes for hounds and also eyes for nature; and as there came a storm, I thought of you,—you and your picture; and so," said he, "I watched the coming and the clearing of it, over just such a sweep of country as you have there.

"A case in point now, Johnson, and what I dwell on. If you would hunt, I am certain," Archer said, "that it would pay you; but you don't, and you won't. So that which you might have seen for yourself and utilised, when you returned with it all fresh before you, I must now," said he, "furnish you with at second-hand; as it is just possible you might perhaps get a hint or two from it that would mend your picture."

"Well, wait a bit," said Johnson; "I want to use this tint while I see form. If I look off it, I shall miss or mull it. My eye's 'in' now."

"All right, old fellow; don't let me disturb you. Tiney! come here, you rascal; I never saw you. Come, doggie! You ought to take him out, not pen him here," said Archer, patting him.

"I do so," Johnson answered, "when I can; and I should take him with me oftener, but he is such a dog to race about and bark at everything and everybody—the noisy little scamp! His weakness too for rabbits gets him wired, which often hinders my time to get him out again; and when I do release him, he is no sooner out than he is in again. He is a perfect Turk, in fact," said he, "at fur and feathers; and when I am able to get out for a few miles, if the farmers see him racing about over their grounds, they don't like it, I can tell you. They half suspect you are poaching; and if you enter into explanations, they think the sketching but a mere excuse, and they say, 'Well, if you come, sir, please don't bring the dog, or else, you see, the landlord will be grumbling, and tell us we're harbouring persons who destroy the game. The game we keep, sir, for other folks to kill, at injury to our crops and no pay for it.' So that you see, Archie,

I have to leave him here, when very often I should like his company. He has his scurry, however, night and morning, along the meadows, and chivies the ducks at the ferry; don't you, you rascal?" said Johnson; "so he does not do amiss. Be quiet, Tiney! Settle him down, will you?" said he, as Tiney's attentions became too obtrusive, "and keep him by you; for when it takes him that way, he will start with sudden dash across my box, and make the colours fly, if I happen just to scratch the canvas while I am working. Such sound is 'mouse' to him. Mouse on the brain has Tiney, that is certain. Show him a bit of sugar, John, and then he'll stay there; or put it on his nose, and that will fix him. Did you have a good day on Tuesday?"

"A fairish ending," was the reply; "but a bad beginning."

"Well, what did you see besides the storm to tell a fellow?"

"Oh, a decent bit or two, as we went on again," said Archer, "after the rain had ceased and the storm passed over."

"How does that look now?" said Johnson.

"Better," said Archer; "but leave it till I have said my say and told my story. Work at the cows," said he, "and put them well in grass; all down, and half asleep."

"Stay! Begin at the beginning," Johnson said; "then I am with you."

"It would be too long," said Archer; "and would only tire you; so I must skip it. Besides, at first, though we had a pretty find at Rookwood, hounds could not run, for there was no scent whatever—not a particle; but just as some of us thought of turning off for home, disgusted, indications of rain showed themselves. The cattle down below us in the fields had ceased to graze; now you, you see, have got them up and grazing. The sheep lay huddled with their noses down, each in the grass; and they are up also in your picture, Johnson; and woodpeckers were on the move and noisy, flying low from bough to bough with warning cry, and hurrying on; the robins, too, kept twittering on the thorns; and on the trees the dead leaves were all tremulous, their rustlings audible. And a cold wind came, that made us shrug our shoulders and move our horses on, to stir our blood; and even the

hounds drew lazily and seemed irresolute. That looked like rain, old man," said Archer, "and soon we had it—a perfect downpour! But we all were glad of it.

"Above us inky clouds, lit up atop, with half-tints deep down in amongst the shadows, were moving rapidly and changing form—a sure sign, Johnson. A flood of light, too, next a rainy distance—like that you have there—though still unblotched, was narrowing visibly. As the storm neared, the sky became one tint, changing from blue-black to a dull steel-gray—yours is too slatey—with curved lines sweeping downwards to the earth—ay, there you are right," said he—"and coming swiftly on to where we were, under some branching oaks, on chance of shelter.

"Then, Johnson, it got dark, and big drops fell, and wet first one bit by us, then another, as we scrouged closer in amongst the bushes, till, with a rattling patter overhead, the rain came down with splash, that sent a shower of dead leaves from the trees, and trickled from the hard ground as it fell, until the steady downpour at last let it in, and so made softer going for our horses.

"Talk of 'storm clearing,' Johnson! well, I saw it," said Archer; "as good a bit as you could wish to see. Yours there is good, old fellow, but that was different; so I will tell you all about it if you like. It might come in."

"It might," said Johnson; "so let us have it, Archie."

"We got wet through, of course," said he, "for boughs were bare; but as the rain brought scent, that did not matter. Well, Johnson, in half an hour or so the storm passed over, and rolled on up the valley for the hills; for it got lurid there, and thundered heavily. And as the clouds that it left broke up, they made a rift in the sky that let the blue in, as I suggested in that picture there," said Archer, "and framed the landscape; and showed, behind the storm and under sunny clouds, a sweep of splendid country in the distance.

"The valley lying in a mellow haze, like that Cuyp, Johnson, that we saw at Dulwich, and quite as luminous, ended in hills softened in shape, and of a warm gray hue, and touched with purple in their deepest shadows; and all their forms were half defined and blended, being misty in the thickened air about them. And then," said Archer, "when the sun burst through, it sent a ripple of bright light across it, that showed, in what was haze, trees, tower, and spire."

"I have seen the same effect myself," said Johnson. "It is very nice. That gradual dawning, as it were, of form, and the growing into shape of trees and hills, is worth the watching. I think few things are finer than the clothing of a valley with its woods—the burst of beauty when its mists withdraw. You see," said he, "that I have noticed it, and watched it often, though, Archie, I don't hunt.

"You hunting men," said Johnson, "may gain in this way. As you are out in weather we should shirk, you get effects that we perhaps should very often miss. Also in distance, you ride more miles each time, we'll say, than we could walk; and also go where we could not well go if merely sketching; and so," said he, "I have no doubt that you often get amongst the woods and hills some first-rate bits, gloriously wild and suitable for canvas, that in a beaten track would be but tame.

"And when you are on the move, from high ground, too," said he, "as in the valley country—our own sweet valley, Archer—easy on horseback, but not so on foot, you get such transitory things—gleams, lights, cloud-shadows, mists, and atmosphere, that they are always useful to a fellow; that I must own," said Johnson, "for you have told me, John, so many times about them."

"Come, I like that; now, that is good," said Archer. "You'll hunt in time. It is just what I maintain, that artist eyes see all there is out hunting, and artists get material that makes money, and cheaper too, old man, that way than any other, as they get more in a given time, and better too, from speedier locomotion and ability to go just where they please, or at least where hounds go. Of course," said Archer, "I only speak of observation, that serves you in good stead when at the easel, as enabling you to make much of 'accidental' form, and to reproduce mental photographs of tints and tones, and hues and shades, that perhaps were too fleeting to be sketched; or 'bits' and groupings that you could merely notice. But for actual studies, Johnson, you must sit down by them. That 'goes without the telling.'"

"You are right," said Johnson. "I interrupted you though, old fellow, in 'the clearing.'"

"Oh, well," said Archer; "as I said, 'twas good. As the light spread over the woods and on the vale below,

there burst upon the view," said he, "distinct and clear, and in mid-distance, deep dips and hillocks, woods and sheen of water, old farms and country churches, and ivied houses, with quaint old gable-ends and chimney-stacks, red roofs and shedding. And nearer still, with soft cloud-shadows on it, a river-sweep of yellow winter grass, dotted with cows and sheep, now up and grazing. Now don't you see," said Archer, "with cattle rightly placed, you aid the feeling?"

"Just so," said Johnson.

"The belt of woods below, being soaked with rain, gave out the resin odour of the pines, whose ruddy stems, in sandy hollows that were near to us—you know the glorious colour that they have," said Archer—"merged from beneath the banks with twisted roots. And as we went along, all things seemed freshened; for the air was clear," said he, "and the sky looked high, and shadows from the trees fell on the turf, into the red dead leaves and long wet grasses, that lay in heaps and matted masses by the oaks. The larches dripped into the golden fern, and every purple spray showed beady drops; the birds were on the move, and some in song; and all around us seemed instinct with life, bare though the trees were, and the month November.

"And as we rode on," said he, "some jays flew out and settled in the firs, and sheep got up and nibbled at the grass, and rooks dropped on the plough, for easy captures now the soil was wetted. A cloud of wood-pigeons, too, rose up, and swooped as suddenly; and twisted hawthorns, creamed with bloom in summer, but bare of leaves and berried over now, had swift-winged visitors that stole the fruit. Storm over, Johnson!

"And as we rode along the lanes," said Archer, "we saw the blue sky in the rain-washed channels, between sundry patches of bright bits of colour, from pebble-stones that were no longer dusty. The big bents in the hedgerows hung their heads, and trailed into the ditch, all wet and heavy; and every cuplike leaf had water in it. The close crisp turf that lay beside the road shone in the sun," said he, "and seemed to sparkle over; and the meadow at the end looked emerald—wet from the rain, and vivid as it was with contrast on it, from the upturned dress and faded winter shawl—a gleam of white and red—

of a youngster, with a basket on her arm ; a very pretty child, old man, I can assure you, and quite a model."

"Look here a moment, Archie, interrupting you," said Johnson.

"Yes," said Archer, getting up and looking at the picture ; "you have that better now ; the cows especially.

"Well, we turned into this meadow with the hounds, through a gate the rosy girl held open for us, and who said her father was a woodcutter, at work close by there where we meant to draw, when the hounds, at least, no longer paused to sniff the little basket that she had, where lay his dinner ; or wait more patting by the merry child, who, being used to hounds, would pet and play with them. Will saw the man," said Archer ; "and as they had not commenced to fell the timber, and there seemed good lying, he said that he would try it, and draw through it ; and so get on beyond to Darnley Woods.

"We kept the ground above," continued Archer ; "skirting the farms by ricks and wainhouses. Such lumber there, my boy," said he ; "rich browns and neutral tints, pale straws and grays, and bits of blue and dabs of brightest red, and splendid colour on old rusty iron, half hidden amongst dock-leaves and great thorns ; with white and speckled fowls, too, perched about it, under some branching elms, by ragged shedding—a mass of weather-stained old moss and thatch—a 'Birket Foster' bit," he said, "that you must see."

"Yes, that," said Johnson, "ought to come well, Archie. How can we reach it ?"

"By rail to Darnley. It is close against the common—another bit which I will tell you of," said Archer. "While Will was pointing for the Darnley Woods, hounds down below him, we kept the team-road on along the fields, and waited at the common till he came through the gate at the end with them, 'drawn blank,' as we expected.

"Well, Johnson, now about that common," continued Archer ; "there's good material there, heath-scenes and figures, gipsies and tramps, with tents and stock-in-trade, and water too, with fine Scotch firs and lots of spotted cattle, and any quantity of gray-green gorse. I also saw a half-bushed gravel-pit, with men at work, and water at the bottom ; wherein the reflex of the sky was seen, the sandy banks and dark lines of the waggons, and just the pink nose of the old gray horse, asleep or dosing.

"Some solemn-looking donkeys too," said he, "were there, tended by lads who did not spare the stick, which they therefore—eh, Johnson?—deserved themselves. And there was a flock of gray geese from a near farmyard, and three people rabbiting; the deep red vest of one man making colour; and a round pool edged with willows near the road, with two buxom girls—one stooping down for water—come from the cottages, a lot of white ones; a disused saw-pit too," said he, "with schoolboys playing, but leaving off at once at sight of hounds; and a way-side inn, or 'ale-house' I should say,—a most likely place, no doubt, for scamps and poachers—with a wood-pile at the back there by some pigsties; a rare good hiding-place for some old fox," said Archer; "and on a cord, from a stable-looking shed to an old tree stump just by some ragged palings, there were some garments flapping in a briskish wind; a bright and wavy line of shifting colour."

"A good bit that; that's useful," Johnson said.

"So that, you see, there are lots of things there," said Archer, "to make a picture, and where you would always find some decent bits."

"Ah, those commons are good places, certainly," said Johnson; "we will go there, John."

CHAPTER XIV.

FLIRTATION IN THE FERNERY—JANE CLARKE AND JOHN ARCHER.

"WE then crossed the road," continued Archer, "on to the turf, and cantered up the hedge-side to the end of it, when Will led us up the lanes to some plantations; and then, as we did not do any good there, we trotted on," said he, "with the hounds to the woods—Darnley Woods, which stretched, with a sweep of purply-brown and gray, along the hills, and sloped down to the village."

"Darnley? Why, that," said Johnson, "is where that view was from they made so much of at the Old Water Colour. It hung upon 'the line,' three from the centre, and sold at the private view. Charles Barrow bought it. It had some cedars in it."

"Ay, I remember it," said Archer. "Oh, very likely; there are some round there; lots of things, in fact,

Johnson. Well, hoping to get a straight thing on the grass, now that the rain had been and laid the scent, the hounds were put in at the upper end; and the moment they were in," said he, "they winded him.

"‘I knew,’ cried Atherstone—you know old Ather, Johnson?—‘we’d find a fox. Hark how they are on him! Come, now, that is good. Quick, push on, Archer, for they will soon be out,’ said he. ‘Too-loo, my boy! we have got a run at last. That rain was splendid.

"‘Hush! there you are,’ said he; ‘they are out and gone away; and if I am not mistaken, straight for Luton. Here, nick across these grounds,’ said Ather, ‘and save the gates. I hate those wickets; a fence before a gate for me, my boy. We’ll take the fences; they are nothing much, and there is but one flight of rails. Come on.’ He is always a straight goer," said Archer, "and a good one.

"While many took the rides and rode the cover, and then got on beyond it through the gates, we turned our horses at the fence," said Archer, "and dropped into a meadow from the road; and then took our own line on a sweep of grass, that curved beneath the woods up to the village; so at a clinking gallop we cornered hounds, and came up with them, going like the wind, and tearing on across some small enclosures, with deep-ditched hedgerows, ditched on either side; so that very soon lots of the men were down, as in those narrow slingity bits you get your second fence too close on the first, and so," said he, "you often get into the ditches, and stop there.

"By pulling our horses together, however," said Archer, "we dropped them to a pace, and fled the fences, and did one of them on and off, as we were too close to fly it, and we very soon got placed; as the hounds feathered as they crossed a road, and then, getting on to some dry plough past the storm, slow-hunted.

"Being now well with them," said Archer, "and with a nice little lot, and select, we settled down to feel our seats a bit, and to swing with the hounds fairly over the fences, taking the rough and the smooth together, just as they came. And then we tried to cut each other down, and laughed at the purls we had; as men will do, Johnson," said he, "when their heads are loose; when Ather, who was just then riding rashly, spied that young George Hill speeding for some rails, that were snug in a corner, and

a tempting bit; the fence beside them being big and brushy.

"‘Just watch me, John; I’ll cut him down at those, the cheeky fellow,’ said Ather, as he raced across the meadow.

"Then reaching the rails, he took them at an angle," said Archer, "right in the face of him, and made his horse swerve, and so sent poor Georgy flying, who dropped well in the hedge up to his neck, and stuck there; for we never saw anything more of him after that," said he.

"However, Johnson," continued Archer, "retribution followed. Ather was racing along with Marston for an ‘only’ place, in a stiff blackthorn-fence, across a pasture, when each of them trying to be first through it—as it was too high to get over it—they cannoned, fell, and rolled; and right between them, as they lay, well grassed, Tom Taylor went and took it."

"Good," said Johnson, laughing, as he touched up the cows, and strengthened the tint on the red one.

"Well, for half an hour or more," said Archer, "the pace was killing; and as the fences were good ones, the falls were not few; so before long, horses were loose and galloping, thinking perhaps that, now they were by themselves, they should see more of it than with their riders on them; so most of them took the fences and followed the hounds well, as they often will do, Johnson, when," said Archer, "they have the right stuff in them.

"We were now getting near to some hanging covers," said he, "that lay beside a long low ridgy hill; Will doing all he could do to kill his fox before he got there, lest we changed. But though each hound strained every nerve to reach him; pug took us to the covers; and there, hounds stood!

"‘He’s down!’ cried Will, ‘for us to find another. We’ll nick him yet, the varmint; hoick there, hoick! Just thong that hedgerow, will you, Mr. Archer? while I take this side,’ Will said, ‘and Dick the other, and cast round.’

"Cracking my whip," said Archer, "I rode up by the ditch; and as I got near to the end of it, out jumped the fox."

"That was lucky, however," said Johnson.

"It was," said Archer.

"I gave 'a view,' and turning short round, I topped the fence, and raced him up a ride, to force him through; Will and Dick," said he, "meeting me with the hounds, who owned at once, and went away merrily.

"Bustling them on with pretty well of voice, we took the outer fence, and reached the open, well rid of that long wood, as it was so safe for foxes; and they ran him through some fields up to a park—where deer half spoiled the scent—and down a lane, and into some little gardens, behind some cottages, just by a common; where I," said Archer, "just as they 'viewed' him, found a fore-shoe off. And so, confound the thing, I came to grief, and had to seek a smith."

"A nuisance that," said Johnson; "so you lost them?"

"I did," said Archer; "but I heard the kill, though, and I met them coming back with the hounds, as I turned from the shop."

"There, then," said Johnson, putting down his palette; "now I'll leave off a bit."

"Ay, do," said Archer. "Come to the Fox with me, and see my mare."

"And how is Charlie now?" said Johnson, as he put up his brushes and prepared to go out with Archer.

"Oh, never better," replied Archer. "He is out three days a week, and leads the ruck, at least most days."

"I heard he was at Warden's," Johnson said. "He is lucky to have got off as he has, the stupid fellow, after a wetting like the one he had."

"Ah," said Archer, "it was the day after the run he was there. He was all right then, and at Highdown—we had a good thing from there, Johnson—but he has been in for sciatica since then," said he, "pretty stiffly."

"And serve him right too," said Johnson.

"Come, now, be merciful," said Archer; "for it was a plucky thing to do. Now, don't you think so?"

"Foolhardy, I should call it," said Johnson; "but you hunt, I don't; and that, you perhaps will say, makes all the difference. Are you but just come in, then?"

"But an hour ago. I put up at the Fox," said Archer, "and came straight here, thinking it likely I should find you come, as you are an early bird."

"Yes; I generally get here by ten at latest. A

splendid morning! I quite enjoyed the walk," said Johnson, "down Severn side."

"And I the ride," said Archer.

"All well at home, John?"

"Quite well," said Archer, "thank you."

So Johnson knew by that that Kate was well.

"And how are all your people?" said Archer. "I called on Monday, but they were not at home."

"Ah," said Johnson, with a merry twinkle of his eyes, "it was a pity, too, that Jennie was out; and so would Jessie say when they returned. They were gone to Malvern, John; I heard from them. Unfortunate, upon my word, now, that it was. I am sorry for you."

"Now, don't," said Archer. "'Those who live in glass houses,' you know. If it is six of one, it is half a dozen of the other."

"Ah, well," said Johnson, "I suppose some day or other we shall have to sink all our old bachelor ways, and become respectable members of society. I vote we both go up 'for execution' on the same day, old fellow."

"With all my heart," said Archer, "if it suits the ladies; for Master Ned has an appointment in view, a three-hundred-a-year affair, Johnson; and if he takes it, as I suppose he will—as he is getting rather tired of the country, and it is a good thing—I must see to the estate myself, or get somebody to do so for me; and as you seem to have made up your mind to take my housekeeper away—I think you and Kate are about settled on that point, eh, Johnson?—why, the best thing I can do," said Archer, "as I cannot take yours—she is a dear good girl, though; I wish I could have had her——"

"She will never marry, John."

"Is to take her cousin, the next best to her, we'll say, old man; but still, a mutual interchange would have been so jolly!"

"Be thankful for what the gods have given you," replied Johnson. "Jessie is getting on the shady side of thirty, John, and Jennie is but twenty-one. Jessie, though a very good sister to me, and an excellent housekeeper, is old-maidish; she loved some fool of a fellow just as she left school, and he married; and she has not forgotten it, the stupid girl; and so, sometimes, she gets mooney and moping. But I don't think really, John, she

will marry ; but as, when I get settled, she will be part of the year with us and the rest with aunt at Bristol, the change might rouse her. No, John," said Johnson, "you will do best as arranged. Jennie is a jolly nice girl, though she is my cousin ; and she will make you a good wife, old fellow."

The Jennie in question was a Miss Jane Clare, whom Archer had met at the Rosary, when she was on a visit to Miss Johnson, for the first time there, as she had then only recently left school ; and as when she came again, and Miss Archer, who was then at home, met her, they recognised each other as former schoolfellows, at the first school they went to, it was agreed that, before Miss Clare went back to Bristol, she should come and stay a week or two at the Grange, with her and a lady friend—a Mrs. Best, a widow—who was on a visit there ; Johnson and his sister Jessie, who could neither of them just then leave home entirely, promising to look in upon them most days.

Both Miss Archer and Miss Johnson were dark-haired girls, but Miss Clare had light sunny hair—the sort of hair, in fact, that Archer was so fond of. And as she was really a very nice sensible girl, with a fair face and a good figure, and a lady—as was to be expected, however, as she was Johnson's cousin—Archer, who had just then given up all hopes of persuading Miss Johnson to change her mind, and so change her name, began to think whether, as he could not obtain the hand of the sister, he might not be more successful with the cousin.

And before she had been a week at the Grange he was pretty well satisfied, from what he had seen of her previously and from what he had seen of her there, that, as the saying is, he might "go farther and fare worse." So he took Johnson into his confidence ; the result of which was that he had more frequent opportunities of getting side by side with her in their rambles around the neighbourhood.

And it was then spring-time, and the whole country was filled with the beauty of it ; for the woods were bursting into blossom, and primroses were everywhere. Violets lent their fragrance, blue sky its brightness, and song-birds their cheerfulness. The young soft green upon the trees was grateful to the sight, and the ripple of the brooks—heard now the floods were gone—pleasing to the

ear. Everything was bright, and all was beautiful. It was a very time for love and love-making, and Archer himself felt the force of it.

Sitting dreamily with a book under the cedars at the Grange, one bright blue morning, he turned as he heard a footstep, and seeing that it was Miss Clare, he raised his hat as he rose and advanced across the lawn to meet her. That chance meeting sealed his fate; for, dressed as she was in the simplest and prettiest of spring costumes, with a bright bow at the neck, and her sunny hair loose under a hat and white feather, he thought as she came towards him that she looked most lovable.

Seeing that she had some little wicker affair in her hand, and was evidently on her way to feed the fowls, that lay about there under the trees after they were let out in the morning, and which were already pets with her, he, meeting her, exclaimed—

“Still thoughtful for your pets, I see, Miss Clare.”

“At your expense it is, though, Mr. Archer. Were I to stay here long, the debt,” said she, “I fear, would be a heavy one. I must not feed them.”

“To be discharged by your good words and smiles,” said he, with meaning.

“An easy payment, rendered cheerfully,” she answered, smilingly. “Your sister asked for you; she thought you had gone up to the Rosary; John, so she says, is coming here soon, with Jessie.”

“I was out there with a book, Miss Clare, beneath the cedars.”

“You are fond of reading?”

“Oh, very fond; I dearly love it. And you,” said Archer, “do you—you look as though you do—like reading too?”

“Oh, dearly, same as you.”

“And poetry, Miss Clare?”

“Oh yes,” said she, “I am very fond of poetry!”

“And who is your favourite author?” Archer asked.

“Oh, Tennyson.”

“Mine also; that is singular,” said he. “We think alike. I am glad ’tis Tennyson. It shows a mind, Miss Clare, a poetry of soul, to love his works, which therefore you possess.”

“Now, that indeed is flattery!” said she.

"We never flatter those we like, Miss Clare."

"Oh, Mr. Archer! There! Kate, I think, is calling. Excuse me, will you not? I will say I saw you."

So Archer could not then commit himself.

But soon she came again. She had "left" the basket, and had quite forgotten "all those pretty fowls." So then they went and fed them—both together.

And coming back he pointed out the views, and then the different peeps across the garden; and strolling on they came to the prettiest one of all, down by the fernery, where, "not to keep her standing," they sat down, for, well shut in by trees, it was shady there; and as he said that Kate was coming there—at least he thought so—they did not hurry, as it was so pleasant; and time, with Tennyson the topic, went on unheeded.

And then he passed to flowers, and talked with her about them and their beauty; then touched on colour, form, art, pictures, books, and wandered off to hedgerow things and ferns, and the charms of young life budding in the woods.

"What say you to a stroll, Miss Clare," said he, "up through the woods, as it is so fine to-day, if Kate and Johnson join us? We will look for primroses and violets. You will come back with an appetite for dinner, and—perhaps 'a truelove.'"

"Now, John," cried Johnson, coming on them suddenly, "don't drop your voice like that. Oh," said he, glancing at his cousin, "how somebody blushes! Never mind, Jennie, I won't look at you. I have been through it, you know, and I know what it is. I am sorry for you both; I am indeed."

"Now, cousin," said she, "what a tease you are! We were merely resting just for a moment—now were we, Mr. Archer, while you pointed out the view from here?"

"Oh yes, quite so," was the reply. "Don't you rise, Miss Clare. In fact, old fellow," said he to Johnson, "you interrupted me before I had time to fully point it out to her; but, as I was saying, Miss Clare, where the trees dip so gracefully yonder to the water, and——"

"Now, John, don't!" said Johnson; "don't you do violence to your feelings. The way the trees at the back here dip and screen you is far superior, and has far greater attractions for you both, I know, than the way they dip

over yonder. Oh, you young hypocrite!" said he to Jennie, passing his hand through the sunny hair that was on her neck, as he stood behind the seat, and raising her dimpled chin till her lips met his, and thus very nearly driving Archer wild at the sight of it. "How are you, you little gipsy? There, run away directly," said he, kissing her, "and get your things on; Kate and Jessie are going with us to the woods. They will think you have found 'a truelove' if——"

"Be quiet, you tease! I don't know what it means," said she, "I am sure I don't; now do I, Mr. Archer?"

"I'll tell you," said Johnson, before Archer could reply, "as you are so very innocent. He means a primrose with six leaves—six leaves or four. They call them, Jennie, round this country, 'trueloves.'"

"Then that," said she, "explains your country phrase—I heard it, cousin!—'To seek your truelove 'mongst the primroses.'"

"Exactly, Jennie, though possibly there is a deeper meaning; but John will tell you. But there, don't stay, you young blush-rose, but trot away and tell them we are waiting. And look here, Jennie," said he, "if Jessie has a headache, and would prefer remaining—mind, I say prefer—to keep Mrs. Best company, tell her we will excuse her, if she had rather not come; but you come, mind—you and Kate—if Jessie cannot; and look for 'trueloves,'" said Johnson, laughing as he pinched her cheek.

"Oh yes, do; come to the woods with us, and seek you yours," said Archer, in a low tone, as she rose and, blushing, left them, and tripped across the lawn into the house, full of excuses for her absence from them.

But Kate and Jessie laughed, and went outside to call them in to lunch—Johnson and Archer. So Jennie, flushing, ran off to her room, and shaking down her curls, soon hid her blushes; and when she brushed her back hair they were gone; but they came again as she went in to lunch, and met John Archer.

And after lunch they started to go up to the woods; Miss Johnson, as she "had" a headache, remaining with Mrs. Best; so Miss Clare and Archer, and Johnson and Miss Archer, went there by themselves. But both Archer and Miss Clare seemed tired, for they did not anything

like keep pace with their companions, but lagged behind sadly. The woods were tangled too, and their search was a long one.

Miss Clare, however, did find "a truelove"—and so did Archer.

CHAPTER XV.

KILLING TIME IN THE COUNTRY—SNOWED-UP.

WITH the new year, as January came in, the frost came with it; the snow, which had been blowing about for a week or two, and even lay deep in places, ceasing for a while. And it was a sharp frost and a lasting one, for it continued. And skates were looked up, and the ring on the ice was heard; so it was all over with the hunting. Long and loud therefore were the lamentations from the country houses and the kennels, and from all the men in town, on whose hands time now hung heavily, as day after day the same old cry was heard of "ice and snow," and "frost again—no hunting," till there really seemed to be no end to it, and that all the weather was made for the skaters only, who rejoiced over it in direct ratio to the bewailings of the sportsmen; men who said, "The worst of it was, it was not only the stoppage of the fixtures, but the holiday it gave the foxes, who would, if it lasted much longer, get so fat and so lazy, that there would be no sport when they did get a run."

And matters did not mend either; for they could hear from the carriers, who could now only reach town by being two or three hours late in a morning, through the roads being so bad, that in the country it was worse, worse even than in town, for the snow lay there, and they were almost snowed up; and that on the high grounds between the covers on the hills, where the wind had lodged the snow in the gateways, there were quite deep drifts already; and all out there said, "We shall have one of the old-fashioned winters, depend upon it!"

It certainly looked like it; for out there in the hill country you could do nothing—nothing at least in the way of hunting, for ice had to be broken every morning for the cattle, and you could talk easily with people over

the river. The birds too were about thicker than ever, and you seemed—for it was “a white world” everywhere—to see further up the valley than you had seen for a long time.

And then, just as the glass, that you tapped and looked at more than usual, appeared to be going down a bit, it suddenly rose; and there came a keen north wind, and a cold blue frosty sky, and a nipping air, so hopes were at an end. Winter had at last set in unmistakably.

The robins came again beneath the windows; and clouds of rooks were seen, that mixed with the starlings in the meadows, and blacked the snow, or scared the field-fares in the little paddock; for the weather was as sharp where we ourselves were that winter as it was anywhere, and we have cause to remember it; for our hunting also was stopped, and that effectually; so that we were quite as much bored by it as were any of the unfortunate folks in the Honeybrook country.

We can also call to mind how, with our two horses in the stable, unable to be ridden—but on whose backs we had hoped to show some of our friends out there “the straight way across country,” and to our home friends, on our return, a brush and a pad or two—we used to resort to all possible devices to get through the day; and how diligently we trotted about the farm to “help” to look over the things, and to count the sheep; and how we could not help wishing there should be some of them lost, and that we should find them in a snow-drift, and so have to dig them out of it—anything, in fact, for excitement.

Our papers we read thoroughly, even to the advertisements; but we could do but little in letters; for it was the same old tale, “snowed-up,” to tell people; and as the postman did not come till midday, and then could not wait—the pull up the woods was so heavy for him—there was not much done in the way of correspondence, as it necessitated a long walk through the snow for ourselves or the boy to take the letters to the post.

So when we had been “round the things” in a morning with the farmer or his sons, we would take a turn about the hedgerows with the dogs and track the rabbits, or perhaps put up some of them in the kitchen-garden, or move a hare or two in the hop-yard, or come again on that cheeky old cock-pheasant in the shrubbery-orchard, who,

if he did stir, would simply walk away leisurely when we did come on him; or, going out in the front at midday, we should find these five stragglers of a covey that used to come upon the lawn—moving about in the shrubs there till they could drop over at dusk into the fold-yard.

We can also remember how, in that weariest of waitings for the frost to go, we had nothing to do but to notice the things that were about us, and to observe with regret how persistently dry the slate quarries in the kitchen would keep, and how free they were from the drip of the bacon in the cratches; and to remark on what a mockery it seemed for the clock on the stairs to cry “Cuckoo!”—the clock that was always kept three-quarters of an hour fast, and yet never “gone by,” and that had a lot of intricate brass-work about it, and “Chepe side” and an olden date under the maker’s name on the face of it.

And how, when we had looked through the paper after dinner, and had nothing more to do, we would stroll out into the back-kitchen, and pinch the batch-cakes there, and the loaves that would be just then out of the oven; or go up into the laundry that was over it, or into the ironing-room that went out of the laundry, where there were a lot of half-dead sticks of geraniums, and such a splendid view from the window, that looked over the lawn to the woods.

Then, after hanging about there till we were tired, and we had again seen the three famous views from the three windows, and had read “Betsy Jones hurs a bad un,” “Our Jem and Mary,” “Bills a fool and Jacks no good,” and other equally entertaining inscriptions, that were scratched on the wall, where the pipe from the stove went through it, we would take a last look at the kiln-hairs, the old hat, the corn-sieve and the flour-bag in the corner, and the ironing-stool and the wicker chair that were against the rails round the landing, and the stray feathers that were about—left from the feather-dressing—and then, descending the stairs into the back-kitchen again, get startled out of our “seventeen senses” by the loud sound of the brittle sticks, as the girl broke them sharply on her knee, to “tind” the fire up a bit—the fire that was on the hearth there—to “bile” the kettle.

Nor do we forget how, having first startled us as to fire, she would immediately, the unfortunate creature, do the same thing by water, by turning the tap on with a

rush, and then, staggering across with the heavy kettle, put it on the pot-hook with a flop that would make the fire beneath it fizz again.

We have a vivid recollection of that girl. She had certainly some stir in her; and she "drabited" the cats with energy, and the fowls that would persist in "keepin' on" coming in there she repulsed with vigour; and her "Now, out with it!" to the dogs when they brought their bones in was certainly to be commended; as was also her "Now, Jem, I'll have none o' that, you know," when the lad came in there to wash his hands, and brought the snow with him. Still, there were times when we could have wished her quieter. But there was no doubt she was a good servant; and her name was Clementina.

And then, having again taken stock of the surroundings, and noticed how shiny the girl's elbows were, and what a "mother's mark" she had on her cheek, and how particularly thick her legs were—as revealed by her short dress, when she dipped suddenly to alter the hanging of the pot, or to push the sticks together a bit to hasten the boiling of it—we would go out from there, and under the pent-house to the dairy, where, had it been hot weather, we should no doubt have appreciated the coolness of it, and have thought more of the cherry-red quarries, and the pretty array of the spotless ware—white, cream, and stone-tint—and the black-glazed pans and the milk-leads and the butter-skeel, and those primrose pats too, that seemed to be so intimately connected with the new loaves we had been pinching.

But it would be of no use our lingering there, as it would be cold enough then anywhere; so we would go through the door by where the churn stood, and have a turn again in the kilns; and for the twentieth time criticise the rude drawings and the writings on the walls, that were the handiwork of the hop-pickers when they had sat by the fires there in the winter, singing those songs that were more noisy than select; and again notice the hook from the ceiling, and think what an odd place it was for a swallow's nest to be on it, and yet for that nest to be as well-built a nest as any that were in the kiln.

And we would also see that there had been as yet no use for the spades and the beetles, and the clod-crushers and things, as they were all still there in their place under

the stairs, with the rest of the odds and ends. And going up the stairs to the drying-room and the bagging-room above it, we would have another sniff of the smell of the hops that remained there, and survey—as though we understood the whole thing—the bales of wool, that were there, ready tied up, for the first “good” man who said “one and elevenpence!”

Then, ascending still higher, we would pick the eating apples over, that were sorted there, and pocket one of the best; and down again, and out from the bagging-room by the back kiln-door, where the ground was on a level with it, by the fagot-rick and the drying-ground, on the bank at the top of the hanging orchard, where the view of the church and the village came in between the trees, and where we could watch for the postman in the morning, to see if he was in the lane, when we were waiting for our letters.

And if no small excitement even then offered, we would go down round the corner to the cider-mill, that was next to the kiln, and so poke about there for a while; and peep through the closed doors at the view over the weir, or through the bars of the shutter, where you looked into the orchard; and we would handle the drenching-horn again to see if we could make it out, and hit the sacking that hung down from the bagging-room, and think what a good “hiding” we could give “the bagger” if he were but in it treading the hops, and look at the kiln-hairs and the cider hairs, and the baskets and the apple-pots, and the oddments that lay about there, and the chips that were there in abundance, thrown down from the fagot-rick.

And then, if the people about the house were still busy, and no one came to take us out of ourselves, we should probably go to the stables, to see how the hunters were getting on in the loose boxes, and regard with a feeling of tantalisation the pads on the door; and look in the coach-house, and note the build of the dog-cart; or, hearing the rattling of their chains as they were feeding, go on into the cart-stable to the horses, and into the hackney-box, where the cob was; and then moon on to the cow-houses, and the bull’s-house, and the boosy, and the calves’-pen, and the pigs’-cot; and thence into the big barn to the men, to sit on the side of the bay, and to chat with them; and after a stay there, go down perhaps into the vaults under

it, but with a shrug of the shoulders at the cold, and a peep up the steps into the garden—where they passed the lead-pipes down into the tub, at cider-making, to enable them to lade the cider into the barrels—soon come up again, and fraternising with the old dog as we came by his kennel, turn into the house, and find tea ready for us.

Those melancholy pipes too that we used to smoke so seriously at night, while discussing the chances of the weather, with our host and his sons—for they were all three of them hunting men—how well we remember them! And those mornings too, when, no matter what was the promise of change overnight, all would be the same again when we drew the blinds up, and were thankful that the days of shaving had departed—the same “white world,” the same cold sky, and the same indications of frost continuing!

The moor-hens from the moat come up to feed with the fowls—the fowls themselves drooping and shivering under the rick-steads, or crooning together against the ricks, unless the “flip-flap” of the flail told them there was grain about, when they would rouse up, and take turn with the birds and the sparrows; the geese hanging about now that the pool was frozen, and standing with first one leg tucked up under their wings, and then the other, or squatted on the fodder to warm both; the cows and the horses munching together amicably at the cribs; the pigs, less fretted and peaceable, runting about in the straw, and visible but at times; and the ducks, usually clamouring at the wicket for the scraps from the hands of Clementina, all lying down quietly under the long water-trough, that would be spiked with icicles at the bottom of it.

And when we used to turn out on the lawn after breakfast, with slight hopes, as a thin light snow would come whiffing down, just for ten minutes at a time—too cold for it to continue—they would be soon dissipated by the ringing sounds we should hear, that told of frosty air and of frozen ground.

The sound of voices on the river-banks, and in the fields, as men called to each other; the noise of the lads who were on the pools, shouting while they were sliding; the loud tap-tap of the horses’ hoofs as they were trotting to the farms or to market; the ring in the woods of the gun-shots, and the call of the keepers to their dogs there;

and later on, the sharp sound of the horn—keen as a huntsman's—as the postman came down through the woods, late with the letters—all telling of the little chance there was of the frost going.

And first one fixture went, and then another, and then some handy one slipped from the list, lost and unhunted, or gone to wait its turn, when the frost should vanish and the turf be safe. And so without one run in the old country, we had to return to our own home again; only, however, to find that it was quite as bad for hounds on that side of the country—snow, hardened, battened snow, and ice being everywhere!

So there was nothing for it but to look with vexation each morning at the horses in the straw-yard, when they were at exercise there—the gray and the roan, and the little black and the bay—doing their round and round with frosty breath; or watch them on the tan, each clothed up carefully with cloth and hood.

And great was the grief with which the saddle-room was visited, where work was wanted for the man and boy; for the bits and the bars and the irons still rested spotless, for they were still unused. It was with perfect wretchedness too, positive misery, that our boots were viewed; as each pair of tops recalled some first-rate thing when our legs were in them, and the grip was good. Inspecting “cords” too only told of joys that, as we slammed the drawer, seemed gone for ever!

At first we got along, though, pretty fairly, for we fed the birds that were hopping about in the garden on their tracks in the snow; and we watched the sparrows that were bumptious with the robins; and we fadded in the stable and glossed the horses, or led the pony out and took the dogs.

And on those days when our sweet village belle drove up with jingling bells and spanking bay, to skate, as was her wont, upon the pool, to show her pretty ankles beneath the scarlet, and play the deuce with fellows' hearts out there, we would do our best in “figure eights” and “edges;” and when she left, stroll up into the orchard, and switch the nettles as we smoked, and thought—thought of the young coquette, and warmly too—the charming, bright-eyed, loving-looking beauty—through the connecting-link of mistletoe, whose berries silvered there the gray-mossed trees.

Or we went into the coppice with the ferrets, or stocked the turf and pitched a quoit or two; or lit a weed and took the cue in hand; or did some double-dummy with our uncle, who, constantly revoking, looked to win; so, as we had to let him, play was useless; but anything was welcome to kill time till hunting came again.

Or we went for mental pabulum in books, and put all back again but those on hunting; or took a moon around that precious sanctum where—best of ornaments—were pads and brushes; our valued trophies, ridden for and won, that made us savagely anathematise cat, dog, and that old poodle-dog, the birds and pigeons, and everything that came just in our way.

But before long our maledictions were extended, for there was no help for it; and so all things came in for them, and even blue pill was thought of. The good St. Anthony, who suffered greatly—so we are told, at least, in song that lives—suffered still more by close comparison, his grievances with ours, in that which tantalised. Had not the wind changed, things would have been serious; but a thaw commenced, which gladdened all our hearts; so we began at once to speculate on the fixtures, whether they would take them slipped, or as per list, the first come first, for the thermometer was rising and the glass going down, so that there really at last seemed a chance for hunting.

It was certainly all slush out of doors, and the country was heavy; but that would mend, and it was no matter if it did not—"Ware winter-wheat and spot the leading hounds." If we were first and meant it, none could splash us; we knew our horses were all fit to go; and as to others—well, that was their look-out. If they got painted, "good mud would wash off;" and if hounds but found a fox, dirt did not matter.

As the next fixture came, all hopes were raised, for the moon looked well and the wind was in the south; field-fares and starlings too were less abundant, and there was far less chatter amongst the other birds. The moor-hens too were back about the moat; the fowls clucked noisily about the buildings; and the galænas once more cried "Come back, come back," as timidly they tiptoed round the hedges. The rabbits came less often in the garden, to crop the parsley and to nibble greens; and stray red apples

there and in the orchard, left "for God's birds," as is the usual custom, no longer looked as if they all were frosted.

The crack of ice, in breaking up, was heard, and the slide of snow in lumps too from the hedges; the drip, drip, drip of meltings from the eavings, where spiky icicles had lately frozen; the squashy tread while all around was sloppy, and all sounds deadened, now that the frost at last seemed really going. The hills, no longer snow-capped, looked afar, and the woods and farms and all seemed now less clear than when, white-topped, as they had been so long, they showed against the gray—the colour Nature takes for wintry skies, cold blue for frost; keeping the bright blue for the butterflies and flowers, song-birds and sunny days, sweet sights and sounds.

The robins too no longer waited underneath the window for the crumbs thrown to them from the breakfast-table; and when the pale sun, that had been so red, peeped out, they hopped upon the thorns, and sang there merrily. The hollies, berried over, shone out scarlet, down in the garden hedgerows and the shrubbery; and in the warmest borders there were crocuses, some very early ones, in clumps of purple, cloth of gold, and white; and snowdrop bells too, and some Christmas-roses, and pink hepaticas, that, as the snow slipped from them in the sun, showed one by one. And Delve the gardener called about the digging, and Pips had vanished with his clarionet. For all such welcome incidents, due thanks were given—special for the last!

At length the morning of all mornings came—the fixture, Prescott; a catch of frost and rather clouding over, but cold and bracing—and it found us on the road with many others, leading our horses, that had frost-nailed shoes, or were else, for safety's sake, steel-tipped or turned up, just for the first two miles till clear of banks, as frost on thaw had glazed them pretty well, and walking warmed the blood. How well the morning "weed" went may be fancied; how full of spirits we all felt again; and how each horse, short-held, chafed and flung his head up, snorting and curveting, so proud and prompt; and how warm were all the greetings as we rode with those we knew and met upon the way!

The postman Munn, the little civil man; the rector's lad, who meets him for the letters; the carrier Smythe,

who creeps three miles an hour; and John Gee, "the daffy," shambling to the doctor for more "Mist. Pect." for churchyard coughs and colds, with Tom, the workhouse idiot, to share load; Old Bates the hedger, with his leather gloves, having his "bit o' bacca, sir, for hasmer;" poor Jones the stone-breaker, abusing guardians, as on his heap he hammers at their ribs, making the stones he breaks fly off and jump again.

The big-boned man, from "the holding" by the bridge, leading his gray that has the short rat-tail; the fisherman Reub Lee, who fishes all the year, and breaks holes in the ice to put his float in—at least they say so; the poaching blacksmith, who slinks by the wood with a most suspicious lurcher at his heels, a hare-hunter. The red-faced packman, who has chaff for girls and blarney for the women at the cottages, then county-courts them for the goods he leaves; the little widow with the old coal-cart, who says she thinks "as how coals will be dear;" Joe with the squire's team, four sturdy bays, going into town for draining-tiles for master; and flighty Jane, who tells her woes to all, and while there is one in sight still keeps on hooting.

The one policeman, who has miles to go, and yet gets railed at if a hen is missing; and Pranx the cobbler, taking home some boots—good strong clod-hoppers, with three rows of nails, rare soil-conveyancers, no doubt, from field to field; and that little Bessie, with the gentle eyes and face so typical of innocence, to whom we have always a good word to say, when, on her way with others to the school, she looks demure and curtsies, and then smiles, as rosy blushes, rippling up her cheeks, spread into the wavings of her soft brown hair. A pretty child with very pretty ways.

To each, and from each too, good words were passed, and for the New Year in, good wishes too.

CHAPTER XVI.

WINTER SCENERY—BINNS THE BASKET-MAN.

AND so the ride to cover was thoroughly enjoyed by all of us, having been, as we had been for three weeks or so, completely frost-bound; but few of those who were then out had much faith in the weather, for the wind since overnight had slewed right round, and it now was north; and many feared that snow was in the air, and that therefore scent was doubtful, even if hounds came.

But they did come, and they found; but the scent was so bad, however, that the hunting came to nothing; as Archer, who was there with Burton and the Honeybrook people, told Johnson, when he came back again next day, and explained about the accident; and how it was that he could not get home that night, and also how lucky it was that his sister Kate and his lady-love were away—both off to Bristol together, and that his brother Edward was also out visiting some friends at Leominster, or the message that he had to send by Burton might have been thought an excuse and have frightened them. "Then it was altogether a wretched day?" said Johnson, when he told him as they sat by the fire chatting in the study at the Grange.

"Well, yes, old fellow, as to sport," said Archer, "but by no means as to country."

"All black and white, though," said Johnson; "not much in that, John."

"Oh, nonsense, Johnson," said Archer; "there is always colour for those eyes that see it. You would have seen it too," said he, "had you been there, as soon as any man."

"Take where we started now," said he; "the cover-side. Well, even there we had it; from elms and ash and oaks, with their rusty greens and grays, and their tawny 'keys' and fluttering leaves of russet, against a background of old trunks and hollies and twisted boughs, and firs and blackthorn, broom and larch and furze—the winter furze that was in blossom—a likely place we all thought for a fox; and so it proved," said Archer. "We found there."

"And round about us on the crispy turf were withered fern clumps battened by the frost, and strewn with dead leaves shining in the sun, that showed up golden browns

and blacks and purples, and shades of yellow and bright bits of red on bramble sprays, over and in long drips, where snow had drifted. I saw it while the hounds were in the thicket, and thought it good. Oh, lots of colour, Johnson! And through the branches we could see the river that flowed below us underneath the cover, edging the meadows with a line of light, and all the trees and woods were mirrored in it, with the reflection of the sky and willows; that also, Johnson, had some colour in it.

"Beyond the meadows, on some rising ground," said Archer, "were some larger covers and some likely copses, sloping up steeply to a belt of woods, deep blue by distance on the dark gray hills. Those hills," said he, "we ran to; but the scent was bad, and hounds checked on the slope. Talk of no colour, Johnson! I saw lots, and all day too. They could not manage, though, to hit it off; so trotting on we found another fox, and messed about with him till all were tired; the scent was bad, though as the snow had come it should have mended."

"You had snow, then?" said Johnson. "We had some here."

"Snow? Yes," said Archer; "and plenty of it too. I thought we should before I started out. The sky, that was so drear all the morning, from dirty yellow changed to slaty gray, and snow came down a few flakes at a time as the hounds checked. Then quite a cloud of small stuff tossed about, and whisked unpleasantly in our eyes and ears; then large flakes slanted with a whirling drive, and the sky got cold and steely; but as the fall increased, quite white with snow. For full an hour at least," said he, "it came a pelter; a blinding mist for horses and for men; when just as we were thinking sport was over, and home our portion, the sky got clear again; the snow had ceased.

"It was then, old fellow," said Archer, "that I wished for you. Before the snow came we could see for miles along the hills and on up through the valley; but when the country was all whitened over, we saw a distance that we had not seen till then. And the valley looked much wider than before, and all within it sharp and well defined; and pale misty forms assumed specific shapes of trees and fences, boundaries to farms, and atmospheric blues were changed to woods, low lying by the meadows. Orchards and hop-yards too, with poles all stacked, showed up dis-

tinctly, as did banks and wastes; but though above us the sky soon got light, it was darker onwards, some cold gray clouds becoming leadeny, threatening more snow. We had it too, and kindly, to go home with."

"I should have turned for home," said Johnson; "and long ago."

"Johnson, my boy, you do not understand it. What is the weather," Archer said, "if there is scent, or even but the veriest chance of it? With hounds in front and some old fox afoot, none think of weather or a paltry wetting! That is for babes and sucklings, and such-like, not for such hardy dogs as fox-hunters. Hunt, Johnson, hunt!" said he; "you will then find out about it. The grandest sport there is in all creation! And horses and hounds too, I am sure, enjoy it."

"The fox as well?" said Johnson.

"And the fox too," said Archer; "for instead of being shot by rascal keepers—as he would be were it not for the hunting—all that he has to do is simply run; so that, you see, if he has any pace about him, the fact is, Johnson, he may live for years."

"And therefore should be thankful that you hunt him?"

"Precisely. A fox has feelings, you know, the same as we have. Well, finding that the hunting was all over, Will stopped the hounds," said Archer; "and as he did so, flakes began to fall, and soon all round us was completely white; for what the morning left, the evening covered."

"The furrowed fields looked flattened in their shroud, and bare-leaved trees loomed spectral-like and large; and each branch was outlined to its smallest twig, like those trees yonder, just beyond the cedars, down by the fernery, where you caught us nicely on that warm spring day."

"Ay, different weather then," said Johnson, laughing. "The blushing beauty, John, was not then caged. They are snowed-up there—at Bristol. I heard from Kate this morning."

"And I from Jennie," said Archer, "who sent her love to you. Snow beautifies, as you know, Johnson, and all looked well; for every hedgerow thorn seemed decked with lace; and leaves—dead leaves, that blew about upon the turf—had all their reds and russets sparkled over; and even ugly trees looked picturesque, so altered were they

by the snow then on them. Plain roofs showed angles from projecting tiles; flat sheds looked ridged from overhanging boards; and wood-piles, that we had never noticed as we passed, looked now well worth the sketching.

"You know that shedding, Johnson, in the park," said he, "for sheltering cattle—we came by Uplands and so down the banks—that you once thought so poor, you would not sketch it? Well, that in its new dress was a bit of colour. I will give it you," said Archer. "If you have a fancy snow scene, stick it in it.

"The long low roof was mellowy-white and gray, with ragged edging and with darkened eaves; the uprights faced with snow, and rough and rugged, and fronting neutral tints and shades of madder; with dark lines marking out the rack and rafters—a backing, as I saw it, to some Scotch cattle that were lying there, with shaggy coats of purple-black and red, in straw, well bedded.

"Behind the shed, that oak—you noticed it—a lightning-withered one, that looked so weird-like as the sun went down that evening we were there, stretched its bare arms across the three old yews, and threw forked shadows down upon the shed, that broke the breadth of white. The sides of it I dare say you remember? High gorse and fern clumps, and a curve of rails—knotted, unbarked, and broken. These were full of good colour too, Johnson, being whitened but in parts.

"So also was that stone trough by the brambles, that fills, they say, night and day from a spring above it, that oozes out of the turf, and running down the hill, makes the brook at the bottom, that miles on becomes a wide stream, that joins with the river, and so runs to the sea. And so again," said he, "were some figures to one side of it—capital colour, and just where you would have placed them, Johnson—two women turnip-cutting, who, with their heaps, made harmonising tints, and shadows that were needed there to blot the white. And just as we moved away, the red sun, that was sinking below the hills, threw a last gleam upon the ground in the front of us—a lengthy primrose patch—that made more blue the shadows on the snow, and toned the lot. It would come well, I think, in a circular picture," said Archer.

"I think, John, you have sketching on the brain," said Johnson. "Your symptoms strengthen. It is a bad case, I fear."

"Well, perhaps I have," said Archer; "but such effects as I see when with hounds are more than you will see in miles of wanderings. I have often come upon such jolly bits," said he, "that, spite of pace and fondness for the sport, I have longed to stop and sketch them."

"Your mental 'memos' ought to save that trouble. They are strong enough," said Johnson.

"Hunt, my good fellow," replied Archer; "you will not repent it. It is good on all scores."

"I know it is," said Johnson. "And as Kate is fond of riding, perhaps I may—that is, to see them meet. I could not hunt."

"Bother!" said Archer; "you can stick a horse. I'll be your guardian."

"Andrews, you say, is better, John?" said Johnson. "Was his horse hurt much?"

"No," was the reply; "he is stiffish, but not hurt; though I never saw a fellow get it kinder than Ted had it. I heard his head bump," said Archer; "but I did not see it, though I was riding with him. His crushed hat saved him."

"Where was it that it happened?"

"This side the turnpike. Charlie and I," said he, "had just turned off the road to miss the ice, when Teddy, I suppose, came straight upon it. However, he was down; and there he lay stunned, and with his cheek gashed. So while I saw to him, Charlie got a car from the inn on the hill; and so we then put him in it and brought him to the Fox. We both rode by him, and I," said Archer, "led his horse."

"Well, when we got there he was very queer, so we got him to bed at once; and when the doctor came, he said we must not move him, until he saw this morning how he was. So as I thought we ought to stay with him, one or both of us," said Archer, "I said that I would do so, if Charlie would ride round or send on here, to save the servants sitting up for me. Oh, he will do now," said he, "right enough. He will have a mark, though!"

"Did he ride back?" said Johnson.

"Not exactly," said Archer; "not quite up to that, old man, though he is better. No, I put him in a car, and rode with him as far as the suburbs; and then, as I found he bore the shake of it all right, I left him, and walked

back to the Fox. One of their men was going to take the horse home. I have sent Gibbes on the brown horse to Honeybrook, to know how he got there and how he is. I shall ride across there myself," said Archer, "to-morrow.

"I saw a good bit," continued Archer, "as I came back over the bridge, Johnson, that would come well in a picture. The swans were there—you know those jolly swans?—sailing amongst the boats, and making colour on the reflections of the painted barges, as, darting flashes of the purest white, they dipped their yellow beaks to catch the crumbs lads with red comforters were throwing to them. Steel tint was round them, from the water there; and a drift of packed ice, lodged against the bridge, gave whitish greens, that told against the stone-tints of the but-tress, and varied form.

"And on the other side—the right-hand side as you come from the country—as I looked over, was another bit," said Archer; "and not a bad one. Beside the towing-path and by the quay, where red and white wide patches in the water marked well the form of every building there, were hay-boats loading, and some 'bold bargees' assisting brawny navvies with some stone, rough-hewn in blocks, and ready to be shipped; the figures grouping fairly with the boats, and full of colour."

"Yes, I should think it came well," Johnson said.

"And at the curve beyond were moving shadows, on the leaden reflex of the sky above, of schoolboys playing, under the crumbling stone wall by the steps, beneath the garden of the Deanery; that ivy-mantled place," said he, "green all the year, that makes so marked a feature from the bridge, and which you must have noticed as you passed."

"Yes, frequently," said Johnson; "and mooned about those steps, and sketched the broken stonework and the ivy, that comes so well there up beyond the archway, where you look all up the river to the bridge under the tower of the old cathedral."

"Which I saw, Johnson, splendidly," said Archer, "last night at dusk, while lolling on the bridge there for a smoke. I strolled down there while Teddy went to sleep. I never saw it better. It looked so high and massive above the trees upon the college green; and in the twilight, dark against the sky, it seemed of one tint, a deep and

purply red, with all its fretwork faintly traced in white, and each niche and canopy marked out with snow.

"And far beyond it, down the river, Johnson, were whitened fields and trees, and distant hills; against a sky that well-nigh had been black, but for a flight of pigeons wheeling homewards, and for the first flakes of some coming snow that, falling, dimmed it. One broad brown sail, that showed beyond the bend, broke the long level of the river-side, and figures at the turn gave fitting colour. A really good bit, so I thought," said Archer.

"Hark!" said he; "there is Bobby. Gibbes is back."

"Yes," Johnson said, "it must have been. The view is very fine, too, there at flood time. You see so far, and get a breadth of white."

"Too great a breadth of it sometimes," said Archer.

"Please, sir," said the servant, as she tapped at the door and brought in her message, "Gibbes is back; and the master's compliments and he's better, sir."

"Oh, very well, Mary," said Archer.

"And please, sir," said she, "here's old Binns the basket-man come, and I was to give that brief to you, sir; and he said he'd wait, please, sir, while you looked at it."

"Tell him to sit down then, and let him have something," said Archer.

"Brief?" said Johnson.

"Petition," replied Archer; "the people round here call them 'briefs.'" So Johnson laughed. "Ah, I see," said Archer, looking at it. "It is for his son. Shall we go and have a talk with him?"

"If you like," said Johnson. So they went.

"This is for your son, I see, Binns; what, is he crippled?" said Archer, as they went into the kitchen.

"Is, sir," said the man; "gun busted, an' blowed two o' his fingers off, sir; an' as it hinders his work i' the filds, we was a-tryin' to rise him a hos, sir, to do a bit o' carryin'; so we be a-gettin' the gentlefolks to put their names down, sir. It were last summer, sir, in Maay, an' he anna done much since, sir. We was out wi' the team ploughin' for swedes, sir; and the women was down i' the hop-yard a-rush-tyin'; when 'Dick lad,' says the mayster, 'take the gun, boy, and frighten them birds there; them beggarin' tomtits be at the marrer-fats agin.' So he did, sir, an' it busted, for the charge he put in—so the mayster said, sir—were too big.

"But theer," said Binns decisively, "he were a fool for gwain, sir; as he might ha' know'd it warn't safe, an' that summat ood 'appen. For you see, sir, the fool of a lad, though he be my son, the eldest o' seven, sir—twenty-two next August—an' four on 'em dead, ony that mornin', sir, passed cock-eyed Jane wi'out spakin' to her."

"What had that got to do with it?" said Johnson.

"Bad luck, sir," said Binns, "not to be civil to a ooman as squints, that be it, sir; an' as if that warn't enough, sir, he must goo, as he comed into the fold-yard, an' walk under the lather, sir, as were agin the tallet! Well, that settled it; so his two fingers was blowed clean off! All fixed though, sir, afore he took the gun; the charge didna matter, though the mayster said so."

"I see," said Archer; "it was his 'fate'?"

"It were, sir," said the man, "through the squint, an' not bein' civil to it. Now, I knows better," said he; "but theer, I had some schoolin', I did, and he daynt. I couldna afford the ha'pence for him, sir; so I oona blame him or be hard on him, poor soul, for I were taught them things, an' tould o' the risk on 'em; an' if ivir I killed a ladycow, or saw the fust lamb wi' its taayl to ma, as somethin' ood 'appen; an' I must moind an' not sow anythin' that day, as it oodna come up, sir. Good Fridy's the day for that, sir. Anythin' you sow then, sir, 'll goo loike woildfire; an' as for stocks, if you plants 'em that evenin', when the sun goes down, they'll all on 'em come up double uns! An' buns an' bread, sir, baked o' that day'll niver get mowldy."

"If you baked for the year, then, you would be all right?" said Johnson.

"Is, sir, we should, ony we couldna git the flour, sir; or else that's what old Pigeon told ma."

"And who is old Pigeon?" said Archer.

"Law, sir," said the man, "an' don't you know old Pigeon, sir? Why, he be the man as keeps the cyder-shop, and sells it good too, sir."

"He sells good cider, does he?" said Archer. "Not too much of the brook-apple in it, I suppose, then, eh, Binns?"

"I dunna kneow disacly, sir, about that theer," said Binns. "But it's goodish—not so good as this o' yourn though, sir—your health, gentlemen both. Well, sir, old

Pigeon ;—we calls him that for short like, but John Pie's his name, sir—(Higgs be his real un), pie John—Pigeon, sir, 'ecos he used to ring 'the pye bell' o' Christmas-day arter service, to hurry 'em on home for the mince-pies an' the puddin', sir, an' gladden theer hearts a' what was a-comin' for 'em ; an' 'the pancake bell' too, sir, o' Shrove Toosdy, he rung that un.

"Well, his mother, sir—she believed in things she did, sir. You know old Pie an' I was great friends, sir," said Binns ; "so when he went, like a dootiful son as he were, to see his old mother o' Motherin' Sundy—'ecos he were partial to a line o' weal, sir, an' he know'd as she'd have it, sir, as were her custom—he took ma ooth 'im ; when darn ma boddy, sir, if a little bit o' a chit as they had fro' the warkus, if she didna goo an' drap the weal—an' a beautiful line it were, sir, wi' kidney-fat an' all to it, sir—flop o' the flure, through a-starin' at ma, sir ; as were then good-lookin', bein' a young un, sir, an' not the feyther o' no family, as I be now, sir."

"Ah, you see what it is to have good looks," said Archer.

"Oh, you hussey !" says the ooman ; "you done it now, you have," continued Binns ; "'you should ha' got the chaps to ha' "haaved" you o' Aaster Mondy, an' then it oodna ha' happened.' The men haaves the women o' the Mondy, sir," said he, "an' the women returns the compliment o' the Toosdy, sir, an' wishes they'd got both days to do it in. 'Haave the women an' save the crocks,' says she, sir. 'You'll never have a breakage all the year then, if you haaves the girl.' So we all laughed, sir," said Binns ; "but hur said it were true."

"You don't believe in old sayings, then?" said Archer.

"Some on 'em, sir," said Binns, "'ecos I knows they be true. It be a great country for sayin's, sir. Now about apples an' blossoms, sir ; if they hangs o' the trees together, ther'll be a death i' the family ; or if you finds a white bane i' the garding. I'se proved 'em, so I knows 'em ; an' snowdrops, sir, theer you be agin ; for at our mayster's somebody brought some on 'em into the house one toime, sir, an' we niver had no gulls, not all that year, sir, as were a great loss ; an' all through them simple flowers, as you oodna think, sir, ood goo for to do sich a thing. That were the year my sister Liza had the twins,

though that were the nuts, sir, that were," said Binns; "so many double uns about."

And Johnson and Archer both laughed heartily.

"Oh, it were the truth, gentlemen," said he; "they be alleys reckoned 'bad for women, but good for lambs;' they brings the 'double couples,' sir."

"What, four?" said Archer; "four lambs and four children?"

"No, sir," said he; "two of a sort, sir, two twins an' a 'double couple.'"

"Well, then, that is four," said Archer; "four lambs and four youngsters. They should put the one against the other, Binns."

"So they should, sir," said he; "but they don't 'sort' right, somehow. The farmers as hasn't got no children, or leastways can afford to be keepin' on 'em, they sides the nuts wi' the sheep, so gets the lambs; an' we as wants the lambs has the twins. That be why I don't hold good wi' nuts, sir."

"Then you have had twins yourself?" said Johnson.

"Is, sir," said Binns promptly, "I has, twice over, sir—that be four on 'em at two times," said he; "as ood 'a bin too much for ma, leastways my woife, if they hadna gone back," said he.

"Gone back?" said Johnson.

"Is, sir," said he; "they went dead; an' it were a year o' double uns both times; the coppies were full on 'em, sir."

"What do they put crape on the bee-hives for, Binns?" said Archer. "We saw some, if you remember, Johnson, in the summer, by those cottages in the valley."

"I remember it," said Johnson. "We stayed to look at them."

"Crape, sir?" said Binns. "I dare say that were at Miller's, the thatcher's, sir; him as died o' the rheumatics, sir, 'ecos he oodna keep a bit o' alder i' his weskit-pockit, as ood 'a cured him; but he daynt believe in it, an' so he went dead. Well, sir," said he, "when the man dies, the ooman puts the crape o' the hives, sir, and taps 'em wi' the door-kay, to keep the bees fro' strayin'; an' when they starts with the corpse, sir, they turns the hives round—that maakes 'em saafe, sir, for that a-year. They oona goo then."

"And do you believe in that, my man?" said Johnson.

"Is I does, sir," said Binns; "an' about the quarrelling. If the man an' ooman gets a-wranglin', spoiteful-loike, the bees'll goo. Oh, it be true, sir," said the man, seeing that Johnson was incredulous, "'ecos Smith and his ooman, as were alleys a-foightin', niver couldna keep no bees. They oodna ha' it, sir; they loikes pace an' quietness, they does."

"Then how do you account for the 'tanking' that entices them back again?" said Archer.

"Same waay, sir," said Binns—"to stop the n'ise. They thinks, 'Let's goo back, bees, an' stop that row with the kay an' the fryin'-pan;' so they does goo back, sir, an' then it stops, an' so they stop. That's how it be, sir. Theer be lots o' bees in our parish, sir."

"You must be a good-tempered lot, then," said Johnson.

"We be, sir," said Binns; "leastways theer ain't nobody not worth quarrelling wi', 'ecos, you see, sir, ourn be the littlest parish theer be—ony forty-one on us a'togither, an' two babbies."

"A 'double couple?'" suggested Archer.

"An' that includes, sir," continued Binns, "the parson an' his lot, an' the lot at the Coort House; an' theer be ony them two houses an' the five cottages—that bit o' a row, sir, by the pound, wheer the lads plays church-while, an' the cyder-shop, sir, as I spoke on—old Pigeon's."

"Well, drink your cider, Binns," said Archer. "We must not keep you; the night draws in apace."

"Oh, thank you, sir; don't let ma hurry you," said Binns. "I can maake maself werry coomfortable, sir, wi' a drap o' cyder—it be oncommon good cyder, sir, too, oncommon good—an' I can find ma waay, sir, if it be iver so laate; so dunna let ma put you about, sir; I'se stop wi' pleasure."

"Well," Archer said, "I will put my name down, Binns, for a pound, and I will leave the money with your wife as I ride by to-morrow."

"Better gie it to ma maself," said Binns, "an' much obleeged to you, sir, 'ecos the ooman maybe ma be carless on it, an' lose it, sir; as ood be a sad thing."

"Yes, it would," said Archer; "or if you dropped it in the cider-shop."

"Oh, honour bright, sir; now you oodna think I ood goo for to do sich a thing, sir, ood you?" said he. "No, sir, this—leastways just the littlest drop more, if I ma be so bould, sir, ool be quite enough for ma, sir, an' thank you, sir."

"Well, if you won't call at the cider-shop, then, Binns, you shall have another cupful, but no more, mind. Just fill it for him, Mary," said Archer. "It is as much as will do you good, Binns; and don't stay now, but get back home to your wife, and tell her I will give her the money to-morrow."

"I ool, sir, and thank you koindly, sir; your good health agin, gentlemen both," said Binns.

"What fishes these fellows are at 'cyder,' as they call it!" said Johnson, as they went back to the study.

"Yes," said Archer; "they are; and yet it seldom touches them or hurts them."

"Too used to it, I suppose," said Johnson; "as they pay wages in part with it. But it cannot be strong?"

"Oh no," said Archer; "or there would be no work in them."

"No wonder, then, when that fellow gets a drop of good, he should want to hang at it. He will stand a hint," said Johnson.

"And must take it, too," said Archer, "or I shall start him."

"What a county it is for sayings, John!"

"If you heard them all," said Archer, "you would say so. In sayings, proverbs, old customs, and superstitions, they beat all people I ever came near."

"From what I have heard since I have been in the county, I should think they do," said Johnson. "Are they a sober lot?" said he.

"Yes, very sober as a rule," said Archer, "and all good-hearted. I don't know any district where you would mend them."

"That's right, then," said Johnson.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWILIGHT MUSINGS—WARNE THE HUNTSMAN.

“For we care not for falls, as we heed not hard knocks,
 So we can but be in at the death of the fox!
 The death of the fox, the death of the fox;
 So we can but be in at the death of the fox!”

“It looks like ‘the death of the fox,’ does it not?” said Burton, as Johnson and Archer were busy painting; and he ceased to drum on the window-panes of the studio, where it faced to the garden and the fields, that, adjoining the Elm-tree-walk, made such a welcome bit of greenery at other times for those who were strolling there.

For the long avenue was one of the favourite walks of the townspeople, as they always got such a nice breeze in it; and it was shady and cool in the summer; and it had plenty of flickering lights and soft shadows about it, and lots of rustle, up in the old elm-boughs, when the wind blew through them, and sent their thin green leaves shimmering to the seats that were under them.

And when Johnson used of a summer evening to sit at the window there, that fronted to the walk, and look down over his bright fringe of flowers, and listen to the band, as all sorts of pretty costumes flitted beneath him, and made nice colours amongst the trees, even he could not help acknowledging—wedded as he was to the country—that, “for town,” it was certainly good.

It was good too when the band had gone, and the pretty muslins—the blues and the whites, and the lavender-grays and the lilacs—had departed; and the old Elm-walk had become “a lovers’ walk.” For then, when it had dusked over and the greens were purples, and the bright stars peeped through them, he could hear in the stillness the sweet chimes of the cathedral, and the striking of the quarters and the hours by the great clock there; that—for the same hands made them—would make him fancy it was “Big Ben,” away at Westminster, and waft his thoughts to those summer evenings, years ago, when—living near there, before he went to Bayswater, and before he knew Archer—he used to spend many an hour in St. James’s Park, and over a quiet pipe on his favourite

seat there, as the last gleam reddened the water, look into the future, and picture to himself the happiness of those—many of whom he would see go by him—who seemed to have some fair face to look upon, some fair form to love and think about.

And that same thought, as he sat at the window in the avenue, and caught the whisperings of the leaves and the low murmur of those who were beneath them, would call up other thoughts, not of the busy hum of the Great City, but thoughts pertaining to the country; to the quiet and the beauty and the peacefulness of “home”—for there seemed now a lasting sound in the word—and to that settled-down feel that he was beginning to have when he thought of the home that was near to it—near to his own home, the Rosary; for it was there, at Grantley, that, in the person of Miss Archer of the Grange, he had at length found his ideal; his complete ideal of face and figure, and of all those womanly attributes that he used to hope he should find in the one he loved—if ever indeed he did love.

But as his love for Miss Kate Archer was a sincere and settled affection, and he now knew that it was not in vain that he did love her—for too “real” herself to play the coquette, or to trifle with him, she, as she liked him, clearly reciprocated it—his thoughts, when they thus turned to the Grange, were pleasant ones; and they contrasted pleasingly with the old thoughts of former days, when the like sounds that came to him on those evenings from the cathedral came to him then from the clock tower, and when all he could at that time look forward to was “single blessedness.”

So that though his thoughts did sometimes, when he was in town at his studio, and listening to the chimes, wander away to the old associations of former days, they travelled in a circle, and ended at the Grange.

And it made work go well with him, when he did work; for he felt he had now something more to live for, and, as he trusted, a great deal of happiness to look forward to; for if all went well with him, he hoped, when the June roses filled the air with their fragrance, that his “dear Katie” would be Miss Archer no longer, but his own rose at the Rosary.

But pretty as was the Elm-tree-walk in the summer,

when the band and the muslins were there, it looked well even in the winter.

For the old trees, that were so fine, bared their branches to the sky, and showed a white front to the gray of it; and their sprays were as fretwork against it. And though the sunset effects there had vanished—their purples, their greens, and their browns—the round red sun would light up the trees gloriously, and throw a glow on the snow in the road, and the bright gleams on the walls of the gardens, where the ivy was white-topped and heavy. But on this winterly morning, when, as February came in, the snow fell fast, the avenue was deserted; for the flakes came down steadily, hiding the outlines of the trees, and making a mistiness of all that was beyond them.

So Burton, tired of looking into the fields, and watching the robins that were hopping about on the white walks below him, and shaking the snow from the bushes in the borders, turned from the window, and said—

“Confound the weather! It keeps coming down as if it had not snowed for a month, instead of our having been snowed up; and we are yet barely into February! That mare of mine, Johnson, is eating her head off in the stable; and with ice still an inch thick on the pools, I see but very little chance at present of our getting any hunting for a month or more. Well, it is an early ‘stopper’ this time, any way. Six weeks actually since the first flake, three weeks without a meet, and one’s horse since that “Prescott” day not out half a dozen times altogether. Confound it all!” said Charlie.

“Don’t be savage, man,” said Johnson, “but stick those hounds up, will you? and while we are waiting, I will put some touches in. It snows so fast, I don’t expect he’ll come.”

“Oh, he will come,” said Charlie, “right enough. He is used to weather, Johnson.”

The one for whom they waited was “old Will”—Will Warne the huntsman; whose likeness Johnson had promised he would paint, to give the wife; Archer to frame it, and to help him with it. And Warden and Charlie Burton had “gone shares” in a wonderful teapot for the old woman, and tea enough with it, “with a pinch o’ green in it, please, gentlemen,” to last her for a twelve-month—“She is a rare woman for her tea,” said Will—as some return for houseroom and civility.

For when they had been up at the Kennels with Johnson, or with Archer, who used also to go and sketch there, and leave his canvas with her, or by themselves, or with some of their town friends, to see the hounds out, or fed, or the horses in the stables, the old lady used to do all she could to make them comfortable, "just in her plain way," as she said.

In the hunting field Warne passed muster fairly, as he was a well-behaved man and always civil, though he had at times a good deal there to try him; through people who would persist in coming out, though they rode in fear, and had to put a guard on themselves to avoid calling hounds "dogs," and who therefore, having nothing sportsman-like in their nature, knew not what to do, or what they should avoid; consequently they were always in the way of hounds, huntsman, and horsemen; a nuisance to all, and so they found favour with none.

But at home Warne was "a character;" and hence, as Burton and Warden always lodged near the Kennels when they were in town, they frequently called there for early information as to fixtures, or whatever else sufficed for an excuse, so that they might have a gossip with him about hounds and hunting, as he was a very decent fellow in his way, and had sense enough to be always servant-like and civil; and though he was made much of by the members of the Hunt, who liked the man, he was never familiar.

The promise for the likeness was an old one; but the sitting for it had been let stand over till they were "blocked by frost;" when, as he said, "he and they would then have more time" for hounds and canvas. But though the weather had for some time "blocked" him, no progress had been made, as Johnson and Archer had been in the country, interchanging visits at the Grange and the Rosary; where, as Miss Kate Archer was at home, and Miss Clare was spending the Christmas with Miss Johnson she having returned with her from Bristol, Archer and Johnson were in a considerable state of happiness; and they had only recently, on the departure of their respective lady-loves—Kate going back with Jennie—returned to town; at least to stay there.

The hounds, however, were already sketched, as they had been taken at odd times at the Kennels; "rubbed-in" by Archer, and finished by Johnson; as well as some of

the Hunt horses, and the gray, that they wanted for a future picture that they thought of, of "Hounds at Coverside"—a joint picture, if it ever was painted—for Suffolk Street.

As Warne's idea for the present picture, however, was "the best hounds by him," they managed, when painting the other hounds, to group together four of the leading ones, namely, Rambler, Warrior, Dauntless, and old Hector; and those were the hounds depicted on the canvas, that Johnson asked for, and that was now placed by Burton upon the easel.

"How shall we pose him, Charlie?" said Johnson, as he strengthened the light a bit on Rambler's nose. "What do you say about it, Archie?"

"I think," was Charlie's answer, "as he said, 'a-sitting and enjoying of his pipe.'"

"If you can turn him, I should take him standing, certainly," said Archer, turning to Johnson with uplifted brush, "alongside this old gray; with horn in hand, and with his hounds about him. I think they would come in well as we have grouped them. The horse," said Archer, "I would paint myself, as in this study, Johnson, if you can change his whim."

"It is of no use," Johnson said, "for I asked him, and he will have it so; as his old woman thinks 'twill look so like him!' If he should come, John, draw him out a bit on hounds and horses, just to light him up. He has a rare good head, if I can hit it."

"He has," said Archer; "and seeing that he is sixty six or seven, it is wonderful that he rides as he does; but he has famous hands, and good nerve; and his heart's with his hounds."

"Young man," cried Johnson to Burton, "just elevate yourself, will you? Rise in the world, and see if he is coming."

So Charlie, who had strolled across to the corner of the room to where there were some canvases, and who was just reeving his nose critically at a study of a fox he had found there, got up aloft, and looked into the end of the avenue—over the stopped-up panes that gave the top light there; but no Will could be seen—nothing but a white world, and snow falling fast, down through the network of the old elm-trees.

"Confound it, Johnson!" said Charlie, as he stepped down from the window, with a shake that sent a 'blob' on to the gray's mane, and caused an exclamation from Archer; "where is the coffee-pot? Let us have a brew! I want some coffee, for out of doors," said he, "it is most wretched. Light up, will you?" said he to the fire, as he poked it. "Oh, for a burst with hounds! I'll fill my pipe.

"The death of the fox, the death of the fox;
So we can but be in at the death of the fox!"

"Then tap goes a hurdle, and crack go the sticks,
As under the orchards we ride for the ricks;
And we swing over one hedge, drop into another—"

"Now do, if you please, be a man and a brother, and consider my nerves; and cease that venerable ditty," said Johnson, "or how am I to work?"

"Keep the chorus, Charlie," cried Archer; "but fresh words would be acceptable."

"All right," was the response, "you unappreciative individual; but wait till our Hunt-dinner, my boy, and I will give you," said Charlie, "a new song to an old tune, a regular House that Jack built, and bring you all in, every man of you. Come now, Johnson," said he, "be generous; and brew, old boy, when you have finished prodging at those hounds with that stiff hog-hair of yours. Just look at his brushes, Archie—enough to set up shop with! What do you keep them in that beastly state for, Johnson? And look at his palette, layer upon layer; never been cleaned for a twelvemonth, I'll be bound."

"Brew for yourself," said Johnson, "you lazy piece of goods; you are doing nothing!"

"There, then, is Will the huntsman," said Charlie, putting down the coffee-pot. "I know his knock."

"Good morning, gentlemen," said that individual, as he made his appearance on the door-mat, his face quite rosy and his coat quite white. "I'll just shake the snow off here a bit before I come in, so as not to mess the room like. There's a deal o' weather out o' doors to-day—a deal o' weather!" And shaking his coat, to Archer's horror, lest he should sprinkle the sky he was putting in behind the gray, Warne entered.

"I'm rather late, Mr. Johnson and gentlemen," said he; "but I had a check at the start, as the Master brought

a friend to see the hounds, so I had to cast back a bit; and when I did hit on again, the snow so balled my feet, the pace was slow."

"Never mind, old gentleman," said Archer; "we have you now. What will you have, Warne? What can we find him, Johnson?"

"I am afraid," was the reply, "there is nothing but ale. We are cider men at home, Warne," said Johnson, "and have to put up with ale here; but if there is anything else you would prefer to it, we will send out for it with pleasure for you."

"Not for me, thank you, sir," said Will.

"Well, then, ask the old woman, Charlie, for a bit of ginger and some sugar, and warm it up for him; there is some bottled Scotch in the cupboard, you'll find; it will keep the cold out. Well, now then," said Johnson, "what about this pipe business, Warne? Do you know, I really think you should change your mind. I certainly don't like the look of it myself; and as Mr. Archer here says, you would look so much better with your hounds and your horse. Come now, what say you: shall we have it that way?"

"Well, sir, I should like it that way myself, sir, certainly," said Will, "there's no denyin' of it; but then, you see, sir, it's for the woman; and 'William,' says she—my old woman, I mean, sir, as you see up at the Kennels; I married her, sir, a matter o' six-and-thirty year ago, when I were First Whip and she were the dairy girl—'William,' says she, 'when they paints you, have your pipe, and be a-smokin' of it; it'll seem natteraler and more nicer-like.' You'll excuse her, sir, but she ain't a eddicated woman, as you can hear, sir; her parents never brought her up properly, poor soul!—no blame to her though, gentlemen."

"None whatever, Warne," said Johnson.

"'For though I says it,' says she," continued Will, "'you smokes a pipe so nice, it do become you. I likes to look at you when you're a-smokin'. And don't you be draw'd a-hootin', William—they alleys puts 'em that way when they paints 'em; a-ridin' down a wood, and off their heads, with hounds along of 'em—because, you know, I can't abear a noise; and if I saw you screechin' there for life, like when you're with the Master—then you must—I'm certain I should turn you to the wall; so don't you

do it. Be peaceable,' says she; 'and if you get your pipe, you'll think o' nothin'.'"

"You like your pipe, then?" said Johnson.

"I do, sir," said Will. "I took to it first, sir, for the toothache, and it's been a great comfort to me ever since."

"So now you smoke from habit?" said Archer.

"Well, maybe, sir," said Will; "but p'raps it is because I likes it. It's sort o' company, you see, sir, and keeps me home o' nights, because I have it comfortable along with the woman, instead o' going into public-houses, as I were never given to, nor any of my family, gentlemen, though I likes a drop o' good ale at home all the same, sir, as it seems to comfort my innards."

"Ay," said Charlie, "the 'innards' are important parts, Warne; that's why I take a drop of it myself occasionally."

"Yes," said Archer; "but you know when to stop, old fellow."

"I should hope I do," said Charlie.

"Then about this pipe," said Johnson; "are we settled on that point?"

"Well, I think, gentlemen," replied Will, "and you, Mr. Johnson, if you'll allow me, I'll be took that way, just to please the woman, doing of a gentle clay, and Hector by me, along o' Rambler and Warrior and Dauntless, just as you've got 'em there, a-lookin' up, you know, while I'm a-thinkin', 'You blessed hounds, we'll have a fox to-morrow."

"You see, sir, Hector, he knows; he judges by my face; the others guesses; so please give him the best of it —by token he's a head! Yes, Hector's got a head."

"Thank you, Mr. Burton," said Will, as Charlie, having brewed, handed the ale to him. "I looks towards you, gentlemen, and I drinks your healths. 'Gentlemen all,'" said Will.

"Thanks, Warne," said they.

"How is it? To your taste, old gentleman?" said Archer.

"Right to a T, sir; thank you all the same. Now then, sir," said Will to Johnson, "when you're ready, I'll begin. I never cares to wait too long by cover. You'd like a tidy lot o' smoke, I s'pose, to show the pipe's a good un, and he draws well? How will you have me hold him?"

"Oh, as you always do," said Johnson; "but don't you really think now, Warne, as you have hounds round you, that you should be taken in the open?—say, standing by the gray, and horn in hand. Mr. Archer has a capital likeness here of the old horse."

"So he has, sir, and much obliged I am to him, sir, for takin' of it; but as I said, sir, it's for the woman. But it'll be quite natural, sir, all the same," said Will, "if I am a-smokin', sir, because I often have 'em in the bower, and in the chimney-corner, all of 'em—that is, by turns; 'bout three or four of 'em at a time, sir; to incense 'em into things a bit, and make 'em sensible. Hector's the one for that; he's sensible, if you like, sir. Why, when we're a-drawing—you've seen him, Mr. Archer?—if he comes out o' cover, it's all over. The rest draw on to keep 'the field' from grumblin', but the Master and me knows there's no fox there."

"Why, bless you, gentlemen," said Will, "that hound, he knows! If Mr. Fox is there, he'll walk straight to him, and look him in the face; as much as to say, 'Now, it's no manner o' use your hangin' here, you old beggar, so out you go; or else I'll have your brush, or "bay" for Master.' He don't mind just givin' him a start for the sake of sport, sir; but when old fox is off, then," said Will, "don't he 'bay,' gentlemen!"

"You don't know that dog language, sir, perhaps?" said Will to Johnson, knowing he was not a hunting man. "It means, 'Wake up, will you, there, you lazy hounds, for I'm agoin'; so if you're fond o' fox, come on a bit.' That quickens Mr. Fox, and brings the hounds; who open too, because they all know Hector; and they know they can trust him. His judgment's perfect."

"A rare good hound is Hector! To see him come out when there's no fox, and stand there whiskin' that old starn of his—he's a fine starn, sir—till all the others come; a-thinkin' to hisself, 'You innocent young pups, though I know all about it, you don't;' and when they do come, to see the looks he gives 'em—it's like a picture! He pities 'em, sir; he pities 'em!"

"But it's much the same with hounds as 'tis with humans, so I take it, sir," said Will; "we ar'n't all worthy to be tarred with the same brush; we ar'n't all got the same knowledge. 'Cause why, sir? If we had, ther'd

be no court-cards in the pack; they'd be all pips alike—not a ace o' trumps among 'em! Now, I call Sir Charles a trump," said he, "beggin' his pardon for bein' so bold as to say so; because it ar'n't every mother's son as can hunt a pack like he can, though a many young bloods as comes out think they can; and a great deal better too, if they had but the handlin' of 'em.

"But that's ignorance, Mr. Johnson; ignorance and vanity," said Will; "the two things as alleys shows a man up. They've vanity enough to think it, and ignorance enough to fancy others ar'n't a-laughin' at 'em. A deal o' both in this world, sir, a deal of it."

"No doubt you are right, quite right, Warne. A little this way, please, the head half turned. Yes, that will do," said Johnson, "very nicely. We have a sketch of the bower, just the shape of it, Warne, and the table in it, as your wife said something about it; and we think of putting Hector on your right, and your hand upon him, as he is looking up; and Warrior by him, with his nose upon your left knee, scrouging in to get his share of notice; Rambler in the front, standing up, as if waiting his turn to be talked to; and Dauntless lying down, just by your feet. Now overhead," said Johnson, "what have we got for that? What comes there?"

"Well, honeysuckles, sir," said Will, "is what grows there; the woman likes the smell of 'em; and up the sides is ivy, and at the back, sir; that with the large dark leaves, sir, like 'gainst the Lodge."

"Oh yes," said Johnson; "I remember now. Rough sketch that, will you, Archie?—depth of rich green behind, light green above; the figures in half shadow, gleam in front—and then come here. I think some such arrangement perhaps might do?"

"I'll try it," Archer said.

"You won't forget a somethin' on the table—the block there in the middle—will you, sir? or those as see it won't believe it's me; by token of a dry pipe, don't you see!"

"What do you want there, Warne? What do you fancy most?" said Johnson.

"Well, if it's mornin' part, p'raps put it ale; a big brown jug, sir, please; but if it's evenin', might be somethin' short."

"The brown jug, Warne, will look best."

"We'll say that then, sir, please."

"There, Warne," said Johnson, after Will had been posed some time. "Now rest a bit, for sitting long is tiring. Pour out the coffee, Charlie, if it's ready—cups round."

"That's what I tells the woman, sir," said Will, "but she won't have it. She says it's 'fidgets.' But I always did like to be on the move, sir. It's very healthy, sir, and stirs the blood; don't allow the innards to get cold!"

"No, that's important, Warne. Come, are you taking care of yourself?" said Johnson.

"Very much, sir, I'm doin' of it, thank you. I knew a man as once died, sir, o' them cold innards!"

"Ah, they are no doubt bad things," said Johnson; "but if you stick to something 'short,' as you call it, I don't think you will have any 'innards' long to take care of, Warne," said he. "Spirits are vile things!"

"Now are they, sir?" said Will, with astonishment; "I shouldn't ha' thought it! They don't taste amiss, sir, just now and then, you know, sir, as a sort of a nightcap."

"Villainous!" said Johnson, who was very temperate. "Give them up, Warne."

"I'll see what the woman says, sir," said Will, too cautious to pledge himself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOUNDS AND CANVAS—THE PICTURE PAINTED.

"You have some nice young hounds, I see, Warne, this season," said Charlie, as he gave Johnson and Archer their coffee.

"We have, sir," said Will; "we've got good places where they goes to 'walk,' most of 'em tenant-farmers, sir, and good sorted ones, as hunts theirselves. At first, as you know, I dare say, sir," said he, "they riots and runs hares, because they see so many of 'em about the farms; but if there's any good in 'em, they'll drop it, after a kill or two and just a 'rate,' though noise I don't hold good with as a rule."

"My father—a fine seat he had, sir—was very quiet."

He'd say, 'Quiet huntsman, quiet pack;' and 'A noisy cubbin' bad for huntin'.' And so I've found it, sir. The less you say," said Will, "the more hounds think of you. With young hounds, if you 'lift' 'em, they'll throw their heads at every fool as shouts, and wait for help at every nick you get, and bother you."

"How many do you take?" said Archer.

"Five couple o' the old to ten o' them, I mostly gives; that makes 'em thirty, sir, and it keeps 'em steady. I let 'em have at first an easy kill, one cub a day, sir; then, as you saw at Pirton, sir," said Will, "a brace; and after that, when we can, however, a dig out."

"You should ha' seen 'em first dig out we had, sir," said he to Johnson; "but you warn't there, sir, 'cause you don't hunt—it were at Paysley Coppies, sir. When I got the cub, and come out o' the cover with him, they thought I was a-doin' 'em out of him, they did; and them young hounds, sir, got as wild as wolves, as though they meant to have the cub or me! Didn't they, Mr. Archer?" said Will.

"Yes," said Archer; "I thought they certainly meant to have you, Warne."

"Why did you not let them have it there, where you dug," said Johnson, "and so have pacified them?"

"Oh, ask those gentlemen there about that, sir," said Will; "that wouldn't do, that wouldn't, sir, at any price; scare all the rest. A fox won't stay where hounds have had 'a worry,' not if there's covers handy."

"You find those great woods awkward, I should think?" said Johnson.

"Awkward at times, but very useful, sir, for varmint foxes, and some good straight runs in the season. They do the hounds good too; they makes 'em hunt, sir, and so improves the lookers and the listeners; and we gets both."

"I suppose you soon can tell what your hounds are?" continued Johnson.

"Well, yes, sir," said Will. "If they'll face gorse and blackthorn, and not babble or skirt, and are low-scented, good drawers, and come to me with their mouths shut when it's all over, then I know I can make a pack of 'em."

"Their mouths shut?" said Johnson.

"Yes, sir," said Will; "it tells o' good wind, sir, I don't like pantin' hounds."

"I don't think," said Burton, "that any Hunt has better hounds than yours, Warne, dogs or ladies."

"No, sir," said he, "that's right enough. They're all as I like 'em; well made and with good wide ribs, that lets their lungs have room, and makes 'em able to give their fox a start, and catch him after. And as for the little ladies, sir, where will you see crisper ears and brighter, intelligenter eyes than they have, bless their little hearts? They're beauties, they are, and not a lemon among 'em!"

"Then you do not like lemon-coloured ones, Warne?" said Johnson, who, of course, knew but very little of hounds.

"I don't, sir," was the reply; "nor them whites. Dark is the best, sir, for lasting, in horse and hound, though mine's a gray; and a good horse he is too. Pied-black, or tan, or badger, not too high off the ground, and with a build like mine. Them are the darlin's, sir, and no mistake," said Will. "Straight legs and strong loins; and a good square head and slantin' shoulders; and round feet and a deep note; and not too long bodied, sir, and with good short starns."

"You are not a long-stern fancier, I see," said Archer.

"Not for the woodlands, sir," said Will; "they gets so ragged; and bare starns makes 'em mean. You see, sir," said he, "in the woodlands they must hunt—they're bound to do it. The pace my hounds will bustle a fox through some o' them thick woods o' yours, when the scent is cold, is a surprise to many; which tells me, sir, as there's a bit o' the old bloodhound strain in 'em, or they couldn't do it; they couldn't, sir. They're steady with it too! Too much dash I don't like; they overrun the scent, as you know, sir, and swing too far before they finds it out; which makes it bad for all of us," said Will.

"Well, now then, Warne, if we may trouble you again," said Johnson, as he finished his coffee, and he saw Will was rested. "Sit just as you were before; with your pipe in your left hand, and your right arm on the chair, where Hector is to stand. Easy to yourself, please, now, and forget I am sketching. That's it; thanks. Yes, as you say," said Johnson, "too much dash is not good; that early woodland work must scare the foxes."

"Just what we want," said Will, "It makes 'em

quick to move, you see, sir, and they don't hang in the cover in the season. The more you rattle them young cubs about, sir, the better runs you'll get when they grows up. It sends 'em out a distance, and learns 'em the country; so gets 'em confident. That's the making o' foxes, that is, sir. A good confident fox, as knows his country, will never skulk or hide; but as soon as hounds are in, he'll stretch his white tip out, and go straight ahead; as much as to say, sir, 'If you don't know the country, I do; so you will not catch me this side Monday week!' And he swings along easy-like to hisself, not caring whether the hounds see him or no.

"Well, that, you see, gentlemen, does the hounds good," said Will; "it aggerawaites 'em like, and gets their bristles up; because they're always a-thinkin', 'If we put on a spurt, we shall catch him now.' And then the pace improves, and they don't catch him; and then, with a whisk of his tip, he has 'em again for a race; and the gentlemen say, 'A fast thing, Warne; this is good sport.' So if even we don't kill him, sir," said Will, "they goes home contented and happy-like; as is a great comfort to me, Mr. Johnson, as has to show 'em the sport, and do all as I can to help the subscriptions.

"Why, sir," said he, "as these gentlemen know, we've one fox who's beat us for seven seasons; and whenever we draw his covers, we dare not so much as let a gate slap, or tap a hurdle in the turnips! The least noise, and my lord's off; and it's then 'catch who catch can;' for when he does go, it's with his black nose out and his brush straight!"

"Do you kill many cub-hunting?" said Johnson.

"Well, sir, when foxes are plentiful," said Will, "as in our woods, sir, unless you can give an account o' sundry brace in the cubbin', you'll have nothin' but cover ridin' afterwards, through fresh foxes a continually getting up; besides, there are them strangers always a-comin', and so makin' more of 'em; foxes, sir," said he, "as are bred elsewhere, but 'travellers;' they likes the big woods, sir, because they're safer.

"I thins 'em out, though, p'raps as much as most; for as our meets are early, sir, we mostly drops in for a good scent; so kill the quicker. Late suppers, you see, sir, with the foxes," said Will, "is the same as with us—they

makes 'em lazy-like at early mornin'; and so the young hounds often gets 'a view,' which puts their bristles up, and makes 'em fierce. Our cubbin' too, sir, is a long one; for most of the woods round has pastures between 'em, and so what grain there is lies wide and nice, and out o' the way; so it does not hinder us. But if it's a dry time, and we have to wait for wet, why, then very often it is all got off before we can make a start of it.

"You see, sir," continued Will, "till the grass damps, it's o' no use; you may as well try to kill a helefunt with a puppy dog! Wet we must have; though when it's very wet, the outside's best, better for the youngsters—the little spinnies and the ash-beds, and such like, sir; better nor in the deep woods; because the wet gets in their ears from the bushes, them youngsters, and bothers 'em; and it makes them slack to draw. A close and 'muggy' day's the day for me," said he, "if there's air enough about to stir the leaves; with a nice drizzling mist, if we've got strangers with us, and want to show 'em what our hounds are like. They will go then, sir," said Will, "and no mistake.

"But what I don't like, sir, though a breeze is good, is high wind blowing. Wild weather, sir, makes wild hounds; and so I've found it. Foxes get sleepy too, then, sir, and the hounds draw over 'em, where the underwood is thick with grass or sedge. And sometimes if it's windy and wild overnight, the earth-stoppers will bank 'em in; because, you see, sir," said he, "instead o' bein' out, they stopped at home.

"It's awkward too, sir, is wind; as hounds can get away without a note heard, and p'raps slip out at the bottom of a cover, five or six couple of 'em, as I've known 'em to. And too much wet," said Will, "that I don't like again; not on the grass-lands, though it helps the fallows, and makes the scent there better, though stiff ridin'."

"Don't move that arm a bit," said Johnson; "thank you, Warne. I won't detain you long. Yes, rain helps you."

"My hounds are good for one thing," resumed Will; "they won't open till they're sure; so when they do, it's then 'Look out! a fox'—and Dick scans the rides at once. They're good at noise too, sir, and seldom stir unless it's one of us. With crow-lads out by scores, and bird-tenders,

by reason o' the miles o' orchardin', we have," said he, "to be stiff with 'em at all noise; so they gets used to 'ratin' when they hears it; and so in time they leaves off noticin' it. But time has been, sir," said Will, "when we've come among the woods at first, that I've gone a mile or more with 'em, only to find a crow chap, screeching away at some confounded birds!

"A good day in the woods will scratch their faces too," said he, "and make 'em pluckier when they're in the open; and the great strong briars and the gorse-clumps that we get there makes 'em poke less at the blackthorns. It's good trainin', sir; helps 'em to go through life properly! With hounds like ours, Mr. Johnson, as are used to the rough of it in them tangled-up woods as we gets in our Hunt, the pace don't flag when we get in the enclosures; for, you see, sir," said Will, "a good woodland hound will face all he gets in the open, and at a good pace too; and as for a gorse-patch, why, he'll work it splendidly. Used to the thorns, the prickles don't affect him."

"Like many, Warne, in this same world of ours," said Johnson, "whose lines, not falling into pleasant places, take rough with smooth, and think but little of it. Now, Archer," said he, "let us have that, if it is ready. Yes," said Johnson, surveying it, as Archer handed it to him; "somewhere about it, I think. Let him see it."

"That, Warne, is how we fancy you will come in best," said Archer, as he showed it to him; "but if you don't like it, say so, and we will alter it."

"Well, I think, gentlemen," said Will, smiling all over his face as he looked at it, "as it's just about it. It shows me in the bower with the hounds, just as I've been a hundred times or more; enjoyin' o' my pipe and talkin' to 'em. Yes, that'll do, right well, sir, so I think. A very putty picture too it is. The woman can't say I'm a-screechin' there. It ar'n't Will Warne 'the huntsman,' though; it's Warne 'in private.'

"There's one thing I forgot, sir, this here pimple," said Will to Johnson. "I hope you'll have that out, as it's a small un. I shouldn't alleys like to see it there, sir, as that jug's by me. People maybe might say things as wer'n't right."

"I don't think that," said Johnson. "It gives 'character.'"

"Asking your pardon, sir," said Will, "I thought the other; and so might lead to character agoin'. Better by far be out, sir, if you please."

"We'll paint it out, then, if you like," said Johnson.

"He's made you look good-tempered there," said Charlie.

"Well, so I am," said Will, "when they don't press my hounds, sir, or override 'em; or make a row and lift 'em."

"If they do," said Burton, "they catch it, I suppose?"

"Well, no, sir, if they've reason. If they haven't," said Will, "I sing out, 'Blame it, gentlemen, don't hurt my hounds!'"

"Yes, I have heard you say so," said Charlie, "and have often laughed to hear you. What makes you say it?"

"Say what, sir?"

"Blame it!"

"Well, I suppose to save—well, sir, somethin' stronger. You see, sir," said Will, "my father was a serious man, by token that his father were a preacher; as used o' Sundays to go round the Greens, and take him with him, to give the hymns out, and lead the country folks a-singin' of 'em. Well, as a lad, sir, I was bad, no doubt—at least I s'pose so—for I know I got in for lots o' quiltin's, for words unproper. I never liked it, but it did me good, and drove it out o' me; so when I 'whipped in' to him with the hounds, sir, and had to 'rate,' we drew the line at 'Blame it!'"

"And well it was we did do so, sir," said Will; "for when the old man died—leastways he broke his neck, and didn't live—our young Sir Charles, who'd just then got the pack, through the old Sir Charles's death, he put me on, sir, 'Because,' said he, 'you know your business, Warne, and never swear; a practice some huntsmen,' says he, sir, 'are rather "given to." 'And never won't,' says I, 'not if I know it. I hold, Sir Charles, it's low life!'"

"You are right, Warne, so it is," said Archer.

"I don't swear myself," said Sir Charles," continued Will, "'nor will I let my men. When people are excited in the hunting-field,' says he, sir, 'it is a habit easily picked up, but difficult to drop again; so by my own

example, and by that of the men about me, I discourage it; and I always let persons see that I dislike it.'

"Now p'raps you'll laugh, sir," said Will, "and why, p'raps I'm wrong—but when I hear people swear, I often think, 'Though I'm a poor man, I'm a cut above you.'"

"And you are right too," said Johnson; "I agree with Mr. Archer, and there cannot be two opinions about that. There is no need for it, no matter how excited a man is or how emphatic he wants to be; it is simply bad, and, as you say, Warne, 'low life.' How long have you been with the hounds, Warne?"

"Come Candlemas, at least a week short of it, sir, a matter o' thirty year, I should say. Let me see, sir," said Will. "I married Maria—my woman, sir—when I were thirty and First Whip, as I think I said, sir, and our old man died just that time nine year; and I'm now—if I live till May, sir—sixty-six. What'll that bring it to, sir?" said Will.

"Twenty-seven," said Charlie, who was always a sharp youth at figures.

"Then that's about it, sir; seven-and-twenty year, and we've never fell out yet. That is my nephew, sir, the First Whip, Dick, and George, the Second Whip, he were his schoolfellow. They're good lads both, and handle horses well, and hounds too, very well. You'd be surprised now, sir, when we divides, as we have to do, you know, sometimes, sir," said Will, "and Dick casts round one side and I the other—like we did that day at Darnley Woods, Mr. Archer, when you jumped the fox out o' the hedgerow, and missed the finish through casting a fore-shoe—how well he acts. A rare good lad is Dick," said he. "If he lives long enough, he'll take my horn—the Master's partial to him. But, there," said Will; "I hope I'll see some good runs yet myself for many a year; but as old father broke his neck," said he, "I might break mine; because where my hounds go, I'm bound to be with 'em; that's where it is, sir."

"Yes; hunting has its risks as well as its pleasures," said Archer, getting up to look how the picture was progressing. "Some good carnations there, Johnson," said he, pointing to the picture, and noticing the tones that had been got in on the cheeks.

"Ay," said Will, as he caught the word; "I like them

good carnations, 'cloves' we calls 'em: the woman has some underneath the window—that's in the summer, sir—in her own patch, and I've got some in mine."

"You don't have the same patch, then?" said Johnson.

"Well, no, sir," said Will; "she likes more o' your fancy sorts—roses on sticks, like mops; I stick to 'cabbage,' as are quite as sweet, verbenums, and such-like, and red geranias. Now I like," said he, "princes'-feathers and sun-flowers, and creepin'-jennies and honeysuckles. She takes to vilets too, as I can't bear; they're nasty things, and grows in woods alarmin'. They spoils all scent. I've often wondered, sir," said Will, "as they've scent for jockeys, as they don't make some for hunters; 'twould sell in winter well, I fancy, sir, called 'Tally O!' when there's no such thing, like now, as getting a sniff; for if there's one scent as I think is better nor another, sir, it's fox scent. I calls it heavenly, and the hounds adores it."

"Well, Warne," said Charlie, laughing at old Will's depreciation of his favourite "Jockey Club," "until you can invent some, dust their noses with a 'brush' night and morning, their only chance of fox scent yet awhile, for the snow falls faster, and it is like to fall."

"You have got that quite in half-light, I see," said Archer, still surveying the picture. "It might be lighter."

"Well, don't mind me, then, sir," said Will, "if you'd like the blind up; for, as you say, sir, it is but half-light, and it might be lighter. My eyes are good uns still, sir, though they're old."

"Thanks. All right, Warne," said Archer. "That is quite 'a feature,' Johnson; I like that," said he, as he pointed with his mahl-stick to Hector, who was limned on the canvas, looking up at Will.

"If that's my nose you mean, sir," said Will, "it is a feature, and one I'm proud of too. It's like the Dook's; leastways a gentleman from London said so—that is, a gentleman's gentleman, sir," said he, "as lived in a park lane somewhere up there, and 'as—so he said, sir—had to sit in a big box by the door, days; that were, I expects, sir, to see as no poachers didn't meddle with the rabbits; and he said it were werry like indeed, sir, as he used to see the Dook—that were when he were alive, sir; he's dead though now, sir, as you know, killed at Waterloo, the great battle

as we've heard tell of, sir. Yes, that I do hope you'll do justice to, sir, for it ar'n't a pug, nor a mulberry, nor pimpled as I've known some have it."

"If you stick to grog, though," said Johnson, "it soon will be."

"No fear, sir," said Will.

"But a great deal of risk," said Johnson. "You shall have justice done to it, depend upon it."

"Much obliged, sir. Then, if you've done with me, sir, I'll be goin'," said Will. "Ther'll be a deal o' weather about, I can see, sir."

"Oh, don't mind home at present, or the weather. We will have some chops about," said Johnson, "and you shall join us; and then, if you are not too tired, we will get you sit again; we shall have the nose perfect then. What say you, Warne? You will not be wanted at the Kennels, you know, and we will cab you home again, and tuck you in, when you start, warm and comfortably."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Johnson, very much," replied Will. "Will Mr. Burton mind, sir, or Mr. Archer?"

"They will mind you don't go back without your dinner, and so will I," said Johnson. "So sit you down, old gentleman, and when your time is up you have but to say so."

"Well, thank you, gentlemen, then if you don't mind my company," said Will, "I'll stay. The woman never waits; she'll have her dinner."

"Right," said Johnson. "Then we will now leave off and have a chat—fill your pipe, Warne—on the hounds and hunting. Touch the bell, Charlie."

"Here, my good girl," said Johnson, as a diminutive whitey-brown personage presented herself; "give that to Mrs. Jones."

When on the mat outside, she read the paper: "Old Burton ale and chops, or steaks, for four." So she smacked her mouth, did pantomime, and vanished. She thought of pickings.

Will stayed and dined, and sat again and talked; had tea, and left, snug in a cab, and tucked up comfortably.

"By Jove," said Archer, as they came in from seeing him off, "what a night it is! You will never get up Severn-side to-night, Johnson, I should think. Better turn in with us, old fellow, at the Fox."

So Johnson did so. "I hope Master Will," said he, "will stick to his promise, and not let that cabman entice him to have anything on the road. He said he would not; but if he does, cold as it is to-night," said Johnson, "it will get over him; and, so far, he has had nothing with us that will hurt him."

"He must take his luck," said Charlie; "and if he will be a stupid, he must be."

"I hope he won't," said Archer.

Unfortunately, however, their care of him was soon after nullified; for the cabman, with the importunity of his race, pleading the cold, so far influenced Will's good nature, as to induce him to "stand treat" on the road; Will, determined to be true to his word, remaining in the cab.

"If I may be so bold, sir," said the cabman, looking in on Will, "would you allow me to bring you a drop o' somethin' at my expense, sir? I don't like," said he, "to see an old gentleman like you, sir, a-settin' here, sir, a-doin' nothin' on a night like this. Now, allow me, sir, please," said the fellow. "Just three small penn'orth o' brandy, neat?"

"Not a drop," said Will. "Drive on."

"Would it be troublin' you, sir, to get out for a bit, sir?" said the man, peeping in again. "I'm afeerd there's somethin' the matter o' my wheel; and I shouldn't, of coorse, sir, like to run the risk o' upsettin' a gentleman like you, sir, as has a thought for a poor fellow of a cabman, when his inside's cold. Thank you, sir," said he, as Will got out, in no very good humour at having thus to wait.

"Now be quick," said Will, as the man pretended to be fumbling at the wheel.

"It's the tire loose, sir," said the fellow, telling a bare-faced lie for the chance of drink. "Now, that's ockard," said he; "for all the cabs and the cars be gone to the theater; and mine," said the vagabond, "is the only one left. Whatever is to be done, sir? It's dangerous, you see, sir, for an old gentleman at your time o' life to be standin' out here on the pavement, with the snow a-blowin' and the wind a-cuttin'; as is the cause o' poor people goin' consumptive and dropsical; and yet you see, sir, though there be a beautiful fire inside, and werry warm and comfortable there, I can't make so bold, sir, as just to ask you

to step inside, because I can see the company you been use to, sir, wouldn't allow o' your demeanin' yourself by goin' where there's only poor people like; or else," said the scamp, seeming to brighten up, "I could really, sir, have this put right in a quarter of an hour or so, that I could;" which, seeing there was nothing to put right, was certainly a safe assertion.

Now, if there was one thing Warne disliked more than another, it was being thought "proud." So he went in sulkily, and sat down, doggedly determined on one point at least.

"Ah," said the fellow, sidling up to him, "it were werry fortunate as I met with you, sir, werry fortunate. Now, sir, when I were on the box, the cold brought the colic; and it were a-gettin' worse rapid, that made me bold to ask you, sir; but Lord bless you, sir, that's took it werry near away, and I'm thankful to you for it, as it has saved me p'raps bein' laid by in orspital, sir, which is ockard with a family to look after and provide for. I do hope it'll go off all right, and not come on again."

"If a drop more will do you good," said Will, "I will pay for it; but be quick."

So the fellow tried the remedy again for the imaginary complaint; Will in the mean time going to the door to look at the weather, which was worse; the snow driving down in larger flakes than ever.

"Here's a night!" said a voice Will recognised, as two people he knew entered, and stamped about shaking the snow off them. "Hillo, Will! You here, old fellow? What are you having? Nothing? Well, if that is not the way to get 'cold innards,'" said one of them, using Will's words he had so often heard, "what is?"

The upshot of it all was, that the fatal word set up such a train of thought that Will's good resolutions went to the wall; and in a great measure—with that old excuse, "for company's sake"—was the cause of his reaching home, not much the matter with him perhaps, but still "market peert."

"A cab indeed! What next, I'd like to know?" were the words with which he was received as the cab stopped at the Kennels, and Will got out, feeling his feet cautiously, as his wife came to the door.

"'Scuse me, Maria," said he, being careful to be not too

fast in the delivery of what he had to say ; “ but I’ve been, you know, and had my picture took. They’s drawed it lovely, and sent me home a perfect gentleman.”

Quoth she, “ I see they have. Warne, you come in ! ”

CHAPTER XIX.

ASPECT OF THE COUNTRY—SPRING APPROACHING.

FEBRUARY, the “ budding month ” of February, was now almost at an end, and the traces of the hard winter had nearly vanished. For the snow that drove down so fiercely on the night the old huntsman felt the effects of it, and that continued with but little intermission for a fortnight, whitening the country, and making the roads well-nigh impassable, had ceased.

And the thaw that followed it had not only filled the brooks, but had overfilled the river, so that the flat meadows beside it were flooded ; making the view up the valley—by the greater breadth of water that was there—still more beautiful, to those who had nothing to lose by it at least, if not to the farmers.

But with the exception of those who had lost a lamb or two, or had some of their sheep washed away by the sudden and rapid rise of the river in the night, and of which they had not been aware until it was too late, there had as yet been but little grumbling amongst them ; for they hoped, if the snow continued to go as gradually as it was going, that after the first rush from the Welsh hills was over, the flood would not be a washing one, but one that would lie awhile ; and so, by fertilising the ground, give them good heavy swathes at haymaking.

There was certainly a good deal of snow under the hedges, where it had blown up the banks, and in the hollows, and in the woods and the coppices ; and the deep drifts between the covers on the hills, where they were five feet high at the gateways, were as high as ever. It would be weeks ere they melted ; but as the days were lengthening, the sun getting more power, and the temperature increasing, all round there hoped that, “ at last,” the worst of the winter was now really at an end. For the fields were brown, and the turf was green again ; and trees

were budding, blossoms showing, and the birds were busy.

And the indications that the spring was at hand increased. Partridges were pairing, hedge-sparrows building, and rooks hung about the rookeries. The tap of the nut-hatch could be heard, and the blackbirds and thrushes sang lustily; the yellow-hammers and the chaffinches were about again, and the linnets and the goldfinches were seen; and the skylark soared high when the sun shone.

And there was a bleating of lambs in the pastures, and a cry as of jays and of magpies. And snowdrops lay patched in the orchards, and primroses were in clumps on the hedge-banks; the furze had some gold in its greens, and the daisies were pinking.

Buds were on the alders, and catkins on the hazels; the coltsfoot was on the clays, and the marigold in the marshes. The tomtits were away from the eavings, and the redwings and fieldfares were thinning; owls could be heard in the night, moles were beginning to be busy, and woodpeckers were on the wing again. Gnats could be seen in the sun, and violets smelt in the morning; and there was a cooing in the woods, and a flutter of young pigeons in the dovecots.

Men were on the fallows, and gardeners were in the gardens; and there was a general planting and sowing going on all over the country. Draining-tiles were about, and hop-yards were thought of; hedges were being trimmed, trees lopped, gaps stopped up, and gates mended; and the prospect of a good year was the topic with the wheat-sowers.

For they all knew that a good hard winter killed the insects, and that it sent the leaves out; not curled, or shrivelled, or eaten, but straight and strong; leaves that would stay upon the trees, and shelter the buds when they peeped out. And they also knew that when the snow lay long, the grass strengthened; for with the soft warm covering and the frozen top, as it could not get long it got thicker. And they were all agreed that for heavy orchards and linking hops, there was nothing so good as a hard winter.

And now, having had a hard winter, "one of the old-fashioned sort," as they said, the farmers looked forward with confidence to having, with one crop and another, a

fair year; so that when you met with them, there was a general heartiness and jollity about them that augured well, and that made you feel hearty and jolly too; notwithstanding that if you came upon them suddenly, their grip was of the tightest; as doubtless best expressing the warmth of their own feelings, now that things promised to be looking up a bit; and so make up for the past year, when hops were light and the fruit was thin; hops and fruit being, as was well known, the chief mainstay with the majority in that district.

In all the country houses, and the farmhouses too, round that quarter, the yule-log had been lit, and put by till Christmas came again; the holly and the ivy had been taken down, and the mistletoe left up; to hang there, with its berries now off, plucked in the kissing, till a new bush, berried all over, was brought in again, with the holly; to look down on the good fare that passed beneath it, and the laughing and struggling couples that were so often under it; and to catch hold of the curls of the merry girls who were held up to it, till they had picked their berry, and obtained release; a release that was not always wished for, when the hoister was young and good-looking.

And the hounds had been out again. And the brooks had bothered the hunters, and the soddened ground had punished them; and there had been but few of those with hounds who had not brought home with them more or less of another man's land; for the soil stuck when you fell, and the dirt remained when you got splashed; and painted faces were the rule to come home with.

More than once had Andrews come to grief, and applied a mud plaster to his scars: scars that remained from the fall we have heard of. Several times had Burton been down, as he thought more of pace than of surface; and John Archer too, for the most part, had kept him company. Wells had turned out, and had also turned over; and Warden and Oliver had been of the company. King had "picked a knife up," and others "had looked for one;" and Sir Charles Kerrison, the Master, had not escaped. Will and the Whips had had their tempers tried. "Blame it!" had been heard, and tail-hounds had been thonged.

Altogether, there had been as much tumbling as riding; though, as Charlie observed, after getting an extra

rattler, it was of little consequence, for "the more falls the more fun;" and that now John Archer's new "pink" had got the gloss off, and showed more of the claret than the scarlet, the appearance of his coat was considerably improved.

And John Archer had moved to Hazelwood, to be with his tenants, the Brandons; and his usual bachelor's party before going there had come off, and a merry one it was, as usual. At home at the Grange, at Grantley, he was near to all his friends, as Johnson lived but three miles from him, and Andrews but five, and Oliver, at the farther end of Honeybrook, was within eight miles of him.

Burton and Raymond of Holme Wood, and Warden of Deepdale, the next village to it, were also near to him, as it was but six miles to the three of them. And to Dawson and King, up the valley, at Dyneley, it was about the same distance; and to Wells, who lived four miles beyond them, he was also within a nice ride, as Royston was but ten miles from Grantley. But when he moved to Hazelwood, which was ten miles the other way, being down the valley, the ten to his friend Wells became twenty; and the distance to his other friends was increased in proportion. So, as a sort of farewell for a time, John Archer always gave a bachelor's party.

And at the party which had just come off, lamentations were heard that it would be the last, or perhaps the last but one, they should have there; for as they were all living within a ring fence, as it were, the intended marriages had become common talk, and they were no longer a secret. And as the pretty hamlet of Hazelwood was within two miles of the hamlet of Coombe Hill—near which was Peyton Hall, the residence of the old Squire, the Master of the Harriers—Charlie Burton, who was of course the foremost of the chaffers, got paid in kind, by the frequent allusions to his great fondness for golden hair, and those who had it; all of which, as he was the best-tempered fellow in the world, he took kindly.

But as John Archer intended to be away till the end of the hunting season, for the handier hunting of the county at the other end, and would therefore be some six or seven weeks at Hazelwood, he had thought it best to put on a working fit; and with old Johnson at home and at hand to keep him up to it, there had been a considerable smell of paint

and turpentine in the little room at the Grange; for the picture of the mares and the colts was on the easel. The branches of the old tree had been lengthened, the colour on the trunk had been hit, and the colts had been worked on; and they were now some of them in half-shadow and some of them in the sunlight, as he told Wells he should paint them.

The picture was thus so far forward that little remained but to do a bit more at the thatch, and to paint in the white pigeons on it, that he had thought, when he was up at the Rookery, would come well, over the chestnut colt. So by dint of sticking to it, he managed to get it finished and framed in time to stick it up at the party, for general comment and criticism. It stood the ordeal, was thought a good picture, and Wells took it back with him.

Johnson too had completed and sent off the Storm pictures, and had made good things of them; and the picture of Will and the hounds had been so advanced that it could be finished in a week. Therefore, as Archer's share in the painting was the larger—for as it went on he had decided to put in the hounds himself—it had been arranged that, as soon as Johnson could spare the time, he should put his traps in the dog-cart and bring them and the picture, which, having removed it from his studio, he had now at his own place, the Rosary, and stay a week or so with him at Hazelwood, as there was a lot of good sketching to be had there, and they could then work at it and get it out of hand.

Besides which, the daughter there was a pretty girl, with a "Greuze-like" head, as Johnson said when he saw her, and he had a great idea of trying to copy it in some of the many times that Archer could keep her in conversation, so as to work it into a "Madonna" picture, when he had the fit on him. "Not a Spanish Murillo one, you know, old fellow," said he, "but an English one, with eyes all innocence, and cheeks peach in tint."

"Now don't," said Archer.

And Miss Archer was at the Grange, Miss Clare at Bristol, and Miss Johnson at the Rosary; and thoughts in the Johnson and Archer families ran much on one topic, with a tendency to look forward more hopefully and eagerly to one season and that summer, and to one month and that June, than to any other portion of the year then before

them; which, considering all things, was not much to be wondered at; or that the thoughts of Miss Archer and Miss Clare should connect June roses with orange blossoms; or that they should both of them have frequent visions of Brussels lace and bridesmaids.

CHAPTER XX.

FLORENCE MILLS AND CHARLIE BURTON.

AND Archer and Johnson also having about this time quite as much of chaff from Master Charlie as they could well stand, they felt bound in self-defence to give it him back again, which they were certainly able to do with interest, as to a certain Miss Florence, his frequent visits to the Hall, and his electing to go now and again with the harriers instead of the fox-hounds; a retrogression that in their minds—Archer's at least—was only to be justified on the chance of having a good jack hare up; but that was in March, and March had not come.

So Charlie caught it; for it was evident that, with such a straight-goer as he was, he was not going to turn out for a hare when he could ride to a fox, were there not something special to be got by it. And as to marry the niece it was as well to be in with the uncle, the baseness of his conduct as a sportsman was accounted for; he therefore got let off easier than he might have been.

Florence—or rather Miss Florence Mills—was the only child of an officer, Captain Mills, who, marrying Miss Howard, sister to Mrs. Burton, Charlie's mother, lost his life two years afterwards in Ireland, in some eviction disturbances, when his regiment was stationed in Dublin. Mrs. Mills then returned to England with her child, and took up her residence at Leamington. There, three years afterwards, she died of consumption, that had been induced by her continued grief.

The child, Florence, thus left an orphan when she was but four years of age, was adopted by the old bachelor uncle, Squire Peyton, of Peyton Hall, who, brother to Captain Mills, had changed his name from Mills to Peyton when he came into possession of the property.

It will therefore be seen that Florence Mills was

Charlie's cousin ; but that "the old Squire" was no relation to him. The aunt, Mrs. Burton, greatly wished for the care of her dead sister's child, and that she should always be with her ; but as Mr. Peyton had been such a friend of the family—the bosom-friend of her late husband—and was godfather to Charlie, she yielded her claim to his wishes.

So, at four years of age, Florence Mills was transferred from the quiet home at Leamington—a sorrowful home to her, poor child, had she been old enough to have understood it—to the larger surroundings of Peyton Hall ; and with a governess to attend to her and a servant specially to wait upon her, she commenced life afresh, petted by her uncle, with whom she had always been a favourite, and made much of by all the people who were about him. No wonder, then, that with every wish gratified, and caressed and indulged as she was, the little lady should grow up a spoiled child.

Florence as a child was simply beautiful ; for what with her dimpled chin, her laughing eyes, and her sunny curls—curls literally golden—her quick intelligent look, almost too intelligent for her baby, innocent, lovable little face, hers was more the sort of ideal face that one sees in books, and that artists paint, than one that we meet with in reality.

And as she grew up she proved a marked exception to the rule that pretty children make plain girls ; for her beauty remained, and it increased as she matured. And as she retained with it all that innocence of expression that she had as a child, and that made her, with her happy look, a favourite with every one, no one who did not know her would have the least idea of the fun and the frolic and the mischief that was still in her. When she came there as a child, twenty years ago, she was a pickle, and a pickle she had remained, as all those about her were frequently finding.

Her cousin Charlie, who was a few years her senior, used at first to assume the big brother, and patronise and protect and see after her ; as he was then often up at his goodfather's as a playmate for Florry ; but he very soon found, after she got accustomed to the great place, and could feel at home, that she was quite as capable of taking care of herself as he was of himself, young as she was ;

and that there were few who, if they got into difficulties, could better get out of them than Miss Florry; or who, if they had a tumble headlong, could get up quicker or say less about it.

So that when he used to act the big dog, and go scrambling about with her on him, or be her pony and kick up when she whipped him, or do the Newfoundland and the terrier, and roll about with her for the mastery, he always knew, however hard she fell, there would be no words about it. As to crying—it was on record that she looked sorrowful once, for a minute, when she got a very hard one; but she never was known to cry, not in any one's hearing at least.

In fact, she was a hard one, and Charlie liked hard ones; for he, as a lad, was always open for a fight—if they would hit and not smack—with any boy; and as he grew up, one of his testimonials at school, to the admiration of the lot of them, was his always being ready “to lick any lad his size,” and to decide any question on the spot by single combat, on the one condition, to hit hard and be friends afterwards.

His other testimonials for the well-liking of him by his schoolfellows were—and to his credit be it named—that he never told a lie; you never heard him swear; he would get any lad out of a scrape, or help him with his lessons; and, hammer him as you may, you could never knock the temper out of him. In short, he was hard and good-sorted, and a little gentleman, and he remained so. Genuine pluck shows breed, for your snob is a cur; and Charlie had the one, and he was not the other.

He and Florence therefore were, as children, suited to each other—plucky ones alike; and the fun they had at times was very great. As for climbing, though duly lectured by her governess on the impropriety of her goings-on, she was always coming in with torn frocks, scratched legs, or dishevelled hair; for she would be after the nests in the spring, and after the nuts in the autumn; and her favourite seat in the summer was up in the boughs, for the breeze. And she was just as bad at paddling—wet stockings constantly—either in the pool-tail for the rushes, or into the brook for pebbles—anything, in fact, to be on the move, or in mischief.

But as she was always on the scamper, she never took

cold, for all her wettings; and she was oftener bareheaded than not so. And such was her flow of spirits, there was no restraining her. One day she would be in disgrace for jumping the pony into the garden and riding him bare-backed round the walks; the next for getting put on the shafter in the team when they came up from the farm at the haymaking, and risking her neck when she whipped him. Or she would get into trouble for catching the donkey, and persisting in mounting, though he threw her; or come in with her frock reddened over by lying at the rabbit holes, listening; or have her long curls all filled with the hay, by burrowing under the cocks like a mole; in short, never was child scolded like that child.

And the young puss was artful too with it, for as she got older she got hardened; and being aware that gout troubled "Uncle Peyton" whenever he "put himself about," she invariably managed, in spite of Miss Bland, her governess, to have her own way, and to get what she wanted; for when the young minx met his denials with "I shall so fret, uncle, if you don't let me, and then I should be so sorry, because that would vex you, you know, and give you the gout; and that would be so very bad for you, would it not?" he thought it better to yield, lest he should have it.

But as time went on, the two wilful ones, Charlie and Florry, were parted; for Charlie, from being weekly boarder at a school in the neighbourhood, was sent to a school at a distance; and from there to the college at Cirencester. And Florence also was sent away, for Miss Bland could do nothing with her; and as she was now a great girl of fourteen, it was thought quite time her wild ways were checked a bit; so after frequent puttings-off by the uncle, and a mutual fretting with both of them, it was finally decided that she should be placed under the care of two sisters of Miss Bland, who kept a school at Kensington; and that, to break through all old associations, her holidays should be spent in Town and in Brighton, with friends of the family; her old uncle going there to see her, instead of having her home with him at the Hall.

And after she had been three years there, and the staid walks in Kensington Gardens with the rest of the pupils had taken the place of the romplings in the Hall shrubberies, she was sent to Paris, to finish there her education;

her uncle still continuing to visit her at short intervals; and when she had been two years more under tuition, she left Paris, and resided for twelve months with her friends in London; where, in the refinements of the society to which she was introduced, the last trace of wild ways was eradicated, and the tomboy of fourteen came back to the Hall, after an absence of six years, an elegant lady-like girl of twenty; very real, very little aware of her attractions, and still joyous and fun-loving, but toned down.

When therefore she came back to the Hall, and Charlie used to ride over to see her, there seemed to have been a great gap between them; and this feeling was increased by the difference between old days and present ones; for he soon found that, although they were cousins, she had still the same objections as ever to being petted or patronised, as, though not vain or indeed anything like it, London society had taught her somewhat of her own importance, and she would not have been a woman had she ignored it.

After a while, however, they got along together very well; for as she was often at her aunt's at the Grange, or Charlie was up with her uncle, they were always seeing each other; and as Charlie favourably contrasted with all others she saw there, she came by degrees to feel somewhat of a cousinly affection for him; which was in no wise lessened by the tiffs and quarrels that between the most loving of cousins will sometimes happen.

And after they had quarrelled and made it up again for three years, there seemed nothing now to quarrel about; so, from being amiable and forbearing towards each other, they became loving, and for the past twelve months they had been on the best of terms.

Still, however, no absolute engagement existed between them; for whenever Charlie did think of marriage, he invariably put off all decision thereon until some more convenient season; but as of late there had been others in the field, and the young lady, to tease him, was inclined to play the coquette, and to be fast and loose with him, he at length determined to go in and win, or, as he used to do at school, punch somebody's head—that somebody being a gentleman who, as he thought, was oftener at the Hall than he need be—only he could do nothing till the hunt-

ing was over; as that of course could not be neglected for anything, whatever happened.

But when that ended, he would see—yes, he would see; for he really did love her; but then it was so natural to love one's cousin, that the climax of marriage had not seemed necessary to insure a mutual continuance of the affection. The knowledge of the marriages that were impending served, however, as a stimulus; for with Archer and Johnson married, there seemed as though there would be a break in the brotherhood, and that a general settling down was perhaps advisable.

His mother, too, had of late taken him to task a time or two as to his frequent visits to the Hall; and had told him that he ought to let it be one thing or the other—gain her love himself, or give others a chance to do so; that she, Florence, was now four-and-twenty, and he, Charlie, was thirty; and that therefore there could be no objection on the score of age, if they really loved each other, and felt they could be happy together; and that it was scarcely fair to Florence to keep her in doubt as to his intentions; and that if he wanted her, and she would have him, she, Mrs. Burton, had no doubt the uncle's consent could be obtained.

Charlie was not behind the scenes. There was nothing, as Mr. Peyton had told Charlie's mother, that would give him greater pleasure than seeing "the young people" brought together; but, as he said, "Leave them to themselves, Mrs. Burton, leave them to themselves." The only condition he laid down for them to have his consent was that they should reside with him. He would thus be spared the pain of losing Florry, and she—Mrs. Burton—could continue at Boscabel; all which amicable arrangement was totally unknown to the "young people."

Mr. Peyton, as we have named, was a very old friend of the family, and a bosom-friend of Charlie's father, who died when he was young; for the same fortunes seemed to connect them. Charlie's family, the Burtons, as we have also mentioned, had been uncompromising Royalists, and had suffered in consequence. So also had the Mills family—Mr. Peyton's; the Hall having been partially burned and dismantled by the Puritans—the crop-heads—after a stern defence, and a running hedge-fight in the adjoining fields.

They had thus been accustomed to talk of old days and of old doings; and when the Squire quoted the line on his ancestor's tomb, in the church on the hill by the Hall, "Loyal to his king and faithful to his country," old Mr. Burton would, with equal pride, quote that on the tomb of his ancestor—that was so close to Boscabel in the gray church at Holme Wood—"True to his king, and a gentleman." A union between the two families would be therefore like bringing old times together again.

And it so happened that, on this bright February morning, Charlie Burton, with an overcoat over his scarlet, was riding down the avenue under the oaks and the firs from Boscabel; to go to John Archer at Hazelwood, and thence to the Hall, to the Squire's, to dine with him; for the morning of the morrow was a "lawn meet" there, a meet of the fox-hounds; for he was a preserver of foxes, being an old Church and King man, though being a Master of Harriers he could seldom find time to do much more than ride with his own pack.

The ride from Boscabel was a pretty one, for you went along through the woods by the river; the water that was now out all over the meadows obliging one, however, to ride through it, in places where the meadows were low, and the woods shelved down to the flat of them. But that did not matter to Charlie; for with the prospect of big brooks on the morrow, he was on the good mare we have heard of, who bore him so bravely from Henley.

And when he reached Hazelwood, he found John Archer at home, and just starting for a turn about the farm with Brandon; so he saw to the mare, changed his clothes, and went with them. And as he found that Archer was to be one of them at the dinner, he was very glad; as it would save him having to leave quite so early—he had arranged to dress at the farm and sleep there, as they were full at the Hall—and they could come back together. A room was always kept for him at the Hall, that he might stay there when he pleased; but he had given it up for that evening to two friends who were invited, Archer having offered to find a bed for him at his place.

But when they had returned, and had lunch, and were looking at the crocuses and things in the garden, chatting to Miss Brandon, a clatter of hoofs near them made them look to the lane; when Charlie ran off with his hat raised,

and was down through the gate in a minute. For the person he spied was Miss Mills, who reined up when she saw him, and the groom, Carter, was behind her.

Shaking hands with her cousin and with John Archer, she thanked Rose for some flowers and evergreens, that she had kindly sent up for her, to aid in the decoration of the tables in the morning; and also for a welcome addition from her father to their own stock of cream.

The Brandons were excellent people, though they were plain and homely; and the old Squire was very partial to both Rose and her mother, who were often up at the Hall with Mrs. Barrow, the housekeeper, a nice motherly woman; and who were going to be ensconced in Mrs. Barrow's room in the morning, "to see the company and to see the hounds."

Cantering off with a smile, and an admonition to Charlie not to be late, Florence left, and he and John Archer turned in again.

"By Jove," said Archer, "you are a lucky fellow, Charlie, to have such a cousin. Were I not already in the lists," said he, "I know where I should look. Go in and win, Charlie boy; she is a splendid girl, and I know she likes you. Why, her very hair—if my dear Jenny had not almost the counterpart of it—would be enough to make me in raptures with her. Join us, Charlie; she will make you a good wife. You need never," said he, "want a better, old fellow."

But pretty as she looked in that dark habit, with her turned-down collar and a cherry bow, when Charlie brought her on his arm to dinner—where she did the honours with true grace and ease—he owned she was a beauty; for dressed becomingly in black and rose, she looked most charming.

The old Squire had the gout, which, as a matter of course, vexed him greatly, as it stopped his riding; and he had hoped to have gone well on the morrow with those who were younger, and to have taken Florence with him; for having foxes in the Home Wood by there, a find was certain. However, as Charlie said that he would see to Florry, he promised she should just go to see the find, and watch them from the hills, but then she was to come home again.

Poor girl! he little thought, with her in all her beauty, how near to death she would be on the morrow.

The dinner passed off well, and all enjoyed themselves; and none the less that all good things were temperate.

Soon after coffee and some songs by Florence, Charlie and Archer left for Hazelwood; and after a moonlight walk across the park, reached home before eleven, and went to bed; Archer to dream of doing wondrous fences, and Charlie of the fair face at the Hall.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HALL, THE CHURCH, AND THE VILLAGE.

PEYTON HALL, the residence of the old Squire, was a plain stone building of three stories, that was built in between two sandstone towers; the one tall and ivied, and the other ruinous and rose-covered; and it was situated on a high knoll in a deer-park, that sloped up from the hamlet of Coombe Hill.

Projecting from the centre of the building was a spacious portico, that gave access to a large entrance hall, that was hung round with armour, antlers, skins, and hunting trophies; a carved-oak table on the one side of it, and a slab on the other, being covered with old weapons and curiosities, and having underneath them some cannon-balls, "Cromwell's messengers," that had been dug up in the neighbourhood, or found in the butts of the old trees that from time to time had been blown down there.

On the right of the hall was the dining-room, and on the left was the drawing-room; and beyond, up some steps, was a landing that ran the whole length of the building, and from which a staircase at either end led to the upper rooms. Opening out of this landing, and fronting to the gardens and the fish-pools, were the breakfast-room, the morning-room, the housekeeper's room, and the library; and on the other side of it, at the back of the dining and drawing rooms, were the kitchen and the other apartments.

At the extreme end of the hall, in the circular recess between the library and the breakfast-room, was a stained window, the height of the hall, filled with old glass, and having on a stage beneath it shrubs, ferns, and flowers;

their arrangement being due to the taste of Miss Mills—the Florence we have spoken of.

The ivied tower at the side, entered at the back by steps from the terrace, contained two rooms; the lower one being furnished as a billiard-room, and the upper one as a smoking-room, a winding staircase in the buttress giving access to them; and at the top was a look-out place, railed round securely, from whence you could see over the surrounding country and up the valley, the deep blue outlines of the Welsh hills terminating the view. At the base of the tower was the tool-house, where Florence fadded with plants, snipped the dead leaves, and potted geraniums; the gossiping old gardener being generally at hand to give his young mistress the benefit of his experience; and close by, in a little aviary, were her doves, that used to coo to her while she was there.

The ruined tower at the other end—rose-covered in the summer—contained but one room; and as that was littered all over with rods and fishing-tackle, wads and guns, whips and sticks, and flies and feathers, and as there were quoits in the windows and bowls on the floor, it was easy for any one to divine whose room it was.

And it was there that the two inseparables, niece and uncle, passed many an hour together; she skimming the news, or reading the *Field* to him; he busy with his flies—he was a rare old fisherman—or, “all attention,” dropping to sleep in the midst of it. She could make as good a fly as he could; so she would often finish them for him, he going on with his nap; and she would sit by him and say nothing, when he would wake up and bother himself; for he could not always understand that he had really finished them.

As the room was hung round with sporting pictures of every description, some of them representing scenes now happily obsolete, and as all the books there were more or less of a sporting character—hunting, fishing, racing, driving, and so on—Miss Florence reckoned amongst her useful knowledge a considerable amount of sporting information; and she was thus well able to hold her own when Charlie and her uncle were fly-making, and the conversation was argumentative. And as her uncle had also a set of small lawn-bowls and some light quoits, when she was about he never wanted for a companion; for with her one-pound quoits

against his two-pound ones, she could often get a "ringer," and sometimes beat him.

The lads in the stables had to look about them, too, when she was at home; for there were few things connected with grooming and stable management that she was not conversant with; and they all knew when she looked in there, to feed and to talk and to mess with the horses, that the white handkerchief would be out; and woe betide them if, on applying it to the coats of her pets, the least dust soiled it!

She also knew every hound that was in the kennels, and they would all come to the rails when she called them. And she could set wires in the hedge for the rabbits, and traps for the moles in the meadow; and if you wanted some trout, she could catch them. She could ride, too, to hounds with the best of them, and jump any fence that she came to. In short, there was not much that she could not do; but for all that she was a little lady in conversation and in manner, and quite as much so as many of the prim ones, who, demure to the world, can be fast in tone and fast in talk when it suits them.

But with Florence all was on the surface: what she wanted to say she said, and what she did say she meant. In fact, she was one of those impulsive, good-hearted, warm-loving girls, ever ready for a frolic, and ever open for fun, who, knowing no harm, think no harm. Would there were more of them!

To the left of the Hall were the stables, and to the right were the kennels; each with ample accommodation for those belonging to them, and screened by the shrubberies, that flanked the towers; and in a circular clearing in the one shrubbery—that next to the ruined tower—were the poultry-houses and the dovecot.

And there it was that, in a morning, Florence was to be found, scattering the grain to the fowls, and feeding the pigeons, that would perch upon her shoulders; and amongst the pigeons were some white ones, that, being special pets, were allowed to come back to the house with her, and to have a kiss each to return again. But when, on warm mornings in the summer, she used to stay by the old tower to cut fresh roses for the rooms, her snow-white friends were in no hurry to go back again; for it was pleasant and bright there, and the sun lay in patches on

the grass; and they had a great idea of perching on her arm and her basket, and making themselves, on the whole, rather too busy; so that she had often to crush some roses and well pelt them with the petals before she could get rid of them.

Sometimes, however, as a special mark of her favour, they were allowed to come and coo about her at the back of the house, under the verandah, when she was busy there with her flowers; or to flutter alongside her between the rhododendron banks, down the steps to the rosary; or to the croquet-ground, where the moat used to be; or on to the patterned garden that was beyond it, down some more steps; or even to the pools by the wilderness, so that they might have a long fly back again to their dovecot, when her fawn-coloured Skye came and startled them, which he used to do as often as he durst do it; he having no idea of anything else being petted there but himself, Prinnie being a spoilt dog, and always accustomed to go off on the hunt for Florence, if he thought she had been away long enough, or he had settled it to his own satisfaction that at least his services must be wanted.

But Prinnie's proudest moments were when he could see his young mistress go out with her riding-whip in one hand and some bread in the other. Then he felt it quite incumbent on him to bark and bound and to scout about; because he knew the black pony was going to be had out, that followed Florence all round the shrubberies, and was then ridden back by her, and that the procession would not be complete without him. Though if Florence chanced to forget he was by, and made that wonderful pony tip up, and, with his fore-legs over her shoulders, stand to be munched, with his cheek to hers, as long as she would let him, Prinnie's pride would change to the direst anger, and the embrace had to be terminated, lest in the extreme jealousy of the moment that pony's tail suffered.

And walled out from the grounds, by the fish-pools, were the kitchen-gardens and the glass-houses. And out of the wilderness by a wicket was a road to the church, that was built high up on a mound by the Hall; and as it was a right of road there, the villagers used it, as it was nearer for them than the road through the park.

It was also at all times a pretty road, as it came by a lane to the fields, and over the brook by a bridge, where

trout used to lie and you could see them; and on through a nut-grove, so dense that the hazel-boughs shadowed the pathways. And the steep ground that was above it was rocky, and the road wound by steps to the top, between banks that were primrosed in the spring, and hung with wild roses in summer.

The church, which was gray, old, and weather-stained, had a Norman doorway, a wooden porch, a wagon-headed roof, tie-beams, and bell-cot; a good deal of ivy, and a few yews; and the churchyard all round it was above the paths, and the floor of the church was below them. Inside the church there was a large octagonal font, some fireplace-looking monuments, and some recumbent figures; the effigy of a former owner of the Hall, and to which allusion has been made, being amongst them. A rood-screen, curiously carved, separated the chancel from the nave, and a modern marble reredos—the gift of a lady in the parish—connected the old with the new.

The village itself—the hamlet of Coombe Hill—was like most of the villages in that part of the country, and consisted of half-timbered houses, black and white, and brown and white; thickly thatched, yellow-mossed cottages; outbuildings, with house-leek on them; old inns, with high sign, trough, and tree; cider-shops, with benches by them; ale-houses, with seats; and a windlass-well, under a pent house.

At the top of the village was a huge elm in the middle of the road, the turning-point and the critical point—for they often used to fall there—for the ponies and the donkeys in the Wake races. And at the bottom of it were the pound and the stocks and the smith's shop. Elms were by the road, and alders were over the palings, and there was a great running to greenery in the gardens, and cottage flowers were in abundance.

Children were on the pavement, fowls were in the roadway, and old women were at the doors; there was a runting and grunting of pigs in the pigsties, a frequent flying of pigeons, and a steady travelling of rooks from the rookeries. A man on foot was an excitement, a man on horseback a sensation; the wheelwright, as clerk, was an authority, and the smith, as "the viol," was looked up to; for "the instruments" still reigned triumphant in that village.

When the new reredos was given to the church, the old rector thought it a good time to do away with the instruments, and to substitute for them the harmonium which was offered, the schoolmistress understanding it, and promising to play it. But the singers struck, and they continued to strike; "the wives of the instruments" making it their business to go round to them, so as to keep them up to the proper pitch of rebellion.

"It oona loikely," as one of them, Betsy Morris, the spouse of the violin, remarked, "that theer be any religion in them 'armonies,' wi' a bit o' a chit o' a girl a-playin' on 'em, loike what theer be on the instruments, when four male feythers o' families be a-doin' justice to 'em!" Which proposition, seeming to have weight in it, was at once acceded to; and strengthened by Jemima Mason, wife of the viol, and aunt to the flute, whose mother being "a-washin'," she spoke up for him.

"I'se sure, though I says it," said she, "the way that feyther o' foive chilthren, an' a pair on 'em twins—as youn brought many a one on 'em into this world, Mrs. Jill—goes roun' the buildin' wi' that flute o' hisn, atween the verses—now up i' the bames, and then down i' the flure, twisting about theer till he can cut in suddint wi' the rest on 'em, when they bosts off wi' verse two,—well, it be affectin', werry much so; that's what it be!

"Now, music loike that be religious; so's the clar'net, Mrs. Perkins"—thanks from Priscilla for the compliment, as her husband played it—"and the viol, petickler for that—I alleys did saay it, and I ool saay it—be loike somebody a-spakin' awful to you, specially when he comes that scrape as you feels it in your stomach."

"That be a-bringin' the power o' music home to you, if you loike, Jane Jill, and bates all your babbies o' cryin'; tho' far be it fro' me to run down your bisness, Mrs. Jill, as I be a mother o' three myself, and you gets your livin' by it;" which thoughtful speech Mrs. Jill duly appreciated. "If they drops the instruments," said Mrs. Morris, "then good-bye to all religion; and I dunna carr if the ould parson knows as I says it; theer now. No, I dunna!"

So as such was the spirited attitude taken by those interested in it, the rector had to give way; as the Squire went more with the old times—the reredos was a pill for him—and he hated anything like a fuss and a bother.

Therefore the old state of things was continued, the rector's teeth being set on edge and his temper tried every Sunday by the tuning of the instruments, and the dreadfully irreverent way in which the whole of the singing was conducted there.

The surroundings of the village were meadows and orchards and corn-fields; a few farms, a great many ricks, and two or three hop-yards; the bulk of the hops being grown higher up the valley. The road to the Hall from the village was by a long avenue of oaks and elms, that swept in a curve through the deer-park, and which you entered through iron gates at the gate-house, which was red, like the towers, and of olden date; the gardener living in the one side of it, and the groom—Carter—whose wife was the laundry-woman, in the other.

In the front of the Hall was a lawn, with a round fountain in the middle of it, a few shrubs, a few flowers, and a wide circular drive; the garden in front terminating by a sunk fence, that separated it from the park, and gave a roadway below it to the stables and the kennels.

Peyton Hall was formerly a fortified manor-house, and the strongest of the many houses like it that were round about that quarter, the traces of which are still everywhere apparent, in the shape of old buildings, moats, mounds, and trenches.

After it had been partially destroyed by fire and shot during the civil wars—as we have mentioned—the old place remained a ruin for years, until, troublous times having passed away, the present house was built, and joined on to the old towers; which it was decided to leave standing for the sake of the picturesque, and as a memorial of former days.

As it is not improbable that some day before very long there may be gay doings in that hamlet, we have thought it well to describe here the village, the Hall, and the church.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE OLD SQUIRE AND THE LAWN MEET—THE RACE AND THE RESCUE.

“THE old Squire”—Squire Peyton—was a hale old man of sixty-eight, tall, and square built; with crisp white hair and a florid face; and apart from the gout—the gift of good living—healthy and active.

A Master of Harriers, and a lover of all sports, he was to all intents and purposes a gentleman; one of the good old stamp; full of their good qualities, but free from their foibles; fond of a glass with a friend, but no bottle man; liking a pipe, but no sot. Moderation in all things was his maxim; and neither in his own house nor elsewhere would he ever take more than was good for him. The consequence was, that all about him were temperate, and his household was orderly.

By the farmers, whose grounds he went over, he was much liked; and as he mopped his forehead after a kill, his “Best run of the season, gentlemen; the finest run I ever had in my life!” was always known to be forthcoming, no matter what the run was. A kill to him was like a victory to a general—he scarcely knew how to contain himself; so thoroughly did he enjoy it, and so much did he enter into the spirit of it.

And he was equally elated with a kill with the fox-hounds; though it was not very often that he could contrive to go with them. Time was when he never missed a day with them, and was foremost in the field; as the brushes in his hall, and the pads on his stable-doors, duly testified. He still, however, rode well, and went pluckily; and he could show many a younger man the way across country when they had a straight-going hare up, and a good scent—times when you could cover his beautiful pack with a sheet. No hounds could be more musical than they were, or run better together; and as there was always sport with them, those who went with them were sure to be satisfied.

He repaired the fences, and he spared the wheat; and every farmer had a hunt hare in the season; so when the men sung out, “The ’ounds be out, mayster!” the farmers

brightened up, and they did not say, "Drat it, Jonah!" or "Consume it, Samuel;" for those who could go jumped into the saddle, and those who could not turned out to see them. They knew with the Squire's hounds there was no harm done, at least none worth speaking of; and he was too good a neighbour to them for blank days to be known to him; for he kept every man to the adlands and the furrows by his watchful, "'Ware wheat, gentlemen!" so that when the coursing meetings were held in his meadows, hares were plentiful.

All liked him—farmers and villagers, workpeople and cottagers; for he had a kindly word for all at all seasons, and help from him in sickness or sorrow had only to be deserved and needed for it to be rendered promptly and cheerfully.

And on this last day of February, the old man was up and about, and as busy as any of them, although he had gouty slippers on—a bar to his joining the meet, as he hoped to do. And Florence also was up and busy, and taking counsel with the housekeeper as to the disposition of the decorations and the laying of the tables. And very pretty she looked too, as she flitted about with her flowers, or, perched on a high stool, linked the greenery. For the sun that came streaming through the east window along with the morning freshness kept making bright gold of her hair, and whitening the white of her dress—the white dress that had blue stripes upon it.

An hour before the time fixed for breakfast—ten o'clock, as the meet was to be at eleven—all was ready; so that when the first arrival came—Charlie Burton as a matter of course, kindly allowed by John Archer to start first—she was at liberty. Whether between the time of his arrival and the old Squire's return from his dressing-room any alteration in the disposition of the decorations was suggested, we cannot say; but we fancy, by the flushed look of both Florence and Charlie when her uncle came in noiselessly in his slippers, that the cousins must have had a scuffling time of it, and been hurried; which was a pity, as it obliged Florence to run up to her room to change her collar and to smooth her hair, and so she had but little time for a chat in the housekeeper's room with Rose Brandon and her mother, who had just arrived.

However, she was ready when the rest came, and in

her place at the table; Charlie, as her cousin, assisting her with the coffee and seeing to the wants of those about him; the Squire's "Now, Charles, my boy, see if you can make yourself useful down there," being all-sufficient for an eager compliance on his part.

And he looked very saucy, and was very jolly; and every one there enjoyed himself; the only regret being the inability of their host to come out with them, and the absence of the Master; Sir Charles Kerrison having lost a relative but a few days previously.

The breakfast was much the same as other breakfasts on like occasions—from game-pies, tongues and chickens, to sirloins; set off with racing cups, and ferns and flowers. Champagne and sherry, homebrewed too, and coffee; and "jumping powder" for the very nervous; and for all outsiders bread-and-cheese and ale.

When no more would have coffee, Florence vanished, and reappeared ere long in riding-habit. Then, as the hounds were on the lawn, she kissed her uncle, and promised she would not be long away; for fences on the north side were still frosty, and he therefore did not wish her to go with the hounds, as, not knowing what fear was, she was not, as he knew, to be trusted, unless he was with her himself. So she was merely to go with the groom to see the find, and then come home again.

As Warne and the hounds left the lawn her horse was brought—a long low dappled bay; fast, temperate, and clever, an easy goer, and with a mouth that answered to the bit; and with the groom at his head, and assisted by Charlie, Florence mounted. Then picking up the reins like one who knew what she was about, she and Charlie followed the hounds down the avenue; John Archer having discreetly moved off previously with the rest of them.

Now, while Charlie was waiting on the steps for Florence, the groom, Carter—a steady-going sort of fellow, whose wife was laundry-woman—having managed to get him away from them to look at some point in the horse he was holding, said in a low tone—

"I do wish, Master Charles, we were not going; at least the young mistress. We shall be sure to get found out, for she is so very wilful, sir. I know she will jump him!"

"Oh, nonsense, Carter!" said Charlie; "she is not a

child. You will soon be back again. It is all arranged, and she has promised to return as soon as hounds go; and they will find for certain," said he, "in the Home Wood. Don't fidget yourself."

"That's where it is, sir," said Carter; "she always promises, sir; but then as soon as she gets the chance, she looks behind to me, sir, and says, 'Carter, I am going to have a gallop, and a jump or two.' Well, sir," said he, "it isn't of course for me to say, 'You must not, miss; ' so off she goes, and I have to follow. Then, instead of one or two just nice little ones, she will get doing ins and outs, there and back again," said Carter, "all along the road, when she thinks there's nobody about who can see her; and not content with that, sir, when she's got his blood well up, sir, she'll race him—put him on the turf, and go like mad; and then pull up, sir, and laugh, with her pretty curls all a-blowing about her. Then, having had her game, Master Charles, she'll say, 'Carter, hold his head, while I do my hair up. We are going to be orderly.' It's all right then, sir; but oh, sir, she do vex me, because if the master knew it, he would put it all to me."

"Don't bother yourself," said Charlie. "Miss Mills knows how to manage a horse, and this one she is used to; at the same time, Carter, as there is a catch of frost about, keep an eye to her, as the best horse may fall sometimes."

"She won't change her mind, sir, will she?" said Carter.

"Certainly not," said Burton.

Acting on Carter's hint, however, "I say, Florry," said Charlie quietly, as they rode together down the park; "you mean to come back again when the hounds find, don't you?"

"I don't know," said she.

"But you promised your uncle, did you not?"

"Yes," she replied; "but I did not say which way, Charlie."

"Now, don't go on, Florry," said Burton; "I shall be vexed if you do, because he asked you not to."

"I shall have a gallop before I do come back," said she.

"But not with hounds, Florry; not with hounds?" pursued Charlie.

"If I do, I can stick," said she.

"Now, Florry," said he, "don't you be wilful, there's a dear girl; but get straight back again, as your uncle is middling."

"Now, don't you excite yourself, Mr. Particular," said Florence; "I dare say I can take care of myself."

"For my sake do so," said Charlie.

A loving look was the answer; and John Archer riding up to them, and looking well in his scarlet coat, that was now well stained, the conversation ceased; and they turned out of the avenue together through the lodge-gates.

In two or three hours afterwards, those gates were again opened, and a car passed through them; but instead of continuing up the avenue, it was observed to turn off over the turf, just where it would have come in sight of the Hall, and to be driven round to the road by the church, where, a little way to the left of the Hall, it stopped.

Three people then got out of it, and leaving the car there, they went round through the shrubbery to the stables. One had on a torn riding-habit, another a scarlet coat, split up the back, and as dirty as the habit, and the third was in a gray suit. They were Florence, Charlie, and a doctor, a Mr. Clifton, who was the surgeon at Aynsley, a village six miles distant from the Hall, and three from Holme Wood, Burton's parish.

"Look here, you fellows," said Charlie, to the men who were there; "you see Miss Mills? She is not hurt, nor am I; so if you like the value of a crown amongst you, keep your mouths shut till I tell you. Now, while we wait here," said he, "you go, Denham, and ask Mrs. Barrow to come here. Say Miss Mills is come; and be quick about it." So the man went directly.

When Mrs. Barrow, the housekeeper, returned with him, Charlie met her.

"Oh, Mrs. Barrow," he said, "my cousin has come back with me, but as the ground was slippery, we have both managed to get a tumble; and as we are rather dirty, while I get a bit of a wisp, she wants you to get her uncle out of the way while she takes off her habit, so as not to put him about, you see. This is a friend of mine, Mrs. Barrow—Mr. Clifton; and while you go in with Miss

Mills, we will have a look round the stables and follow you."

"It is very thoughtful indeed of you, Mr. Charles, for the master is but poorly," said Mrs. Barrow; "but as he was very tired after the breakfast, he has gone to lie down a bit, and he said I was not to call him till lunch-time."

"Then we will follow you directly," said Charlie, as Florence went with her.

Mrs. Barrow, who was a prudent woman, was afterwards let into the secret; and Florence lay down for an hour. Charlie's coat was then sewn up and sponged; the doctor went back in the car; the housekeeper persuaded the old gentleman, as Miss Mills had come back, to have his lunch sent up, and to lie till dinner was ready; and the servants were tutored; so that by the time the Squire came down, the groom had returned with Charlie's mare, and all was in place; Miss Mills, "having a headache," begging to be excused joining them at dinner.

So Charlie and the Squire dined alone; and he managed, by a little manœuvring, to pass over the account of the run till after dinner, when, as he said, he should be able to give him chapter and verse about it; as he, Charlie, had promised, on the strength of the narrative, to stay the night there, so as to be the better able to tell him all about the day's doings.

As soon as dinner was over, Charlie slipped out to see, as he said, "how his mare was getting on," and he then sent a man to Hazelwood to Archer. But before Burton came back, Mrs. Barrow, acting on the hint she had, had almost persuaded the old gentleman to return to his room, and Charlie's own arguments settled it; so the account of the run was again able to be postponed, till counsel had been taken with Florence; who, going into her uncle's room to see how he was, let him also see that she herself was well; and then, by a forced gaiety, she managed to put him off as to her own account of the find, on the plea that she was tired; "But when you come down to tea, uncle, you shall hear it all."

Word had been also sent to Boscabel to Charlie's mother, by the doctor, who kindly promised to go there himself, lest the news should reach her; and he was also to tell them to send word to the Rosary; and as no one, who was likely to have heard of the escape, could come to

the Hall without Charlie seeing them, they felt pretty safe in delaying matters until they could think things over as to her uncle.

So Florence and Charlie had the evening before them, to arrange as to the best mode of breaking it to him; for as the bay horse was dead, there was no getting out of it.

"Oh, Charlie," said Florence, when she came downstairs to him and kissed him, "I am so glad I have got away from uncle, for I could not have held up much longer; and that dear horse too. To think that I shall never have a gallop on him again, poor fellow! Are you sure you are not hurt, dear?" said she.

"Quite sure, my darling," said Charlie.

"But your face, love, it is as red as can be?" she said.

"It is nothing but where the steam caught it, Florry; your uncle did not notice it, as I remarked to him how warm the room was. I cannot imagine, my dear girl," said Charlie, "how you could have stuck to the bay as you did. The very fright was enough to have dropped you."

"I never felt frightened, Charlie, till the train came. I only felt vexed; vexed that you should see that he was master, and that I could not hold him; but when that fearful whistle came, and I knew it was a train, and I heard it coming round the corner, and I could not even then stop him—oh, Charlie, I shall never forget it!" said Florence, "never!"

"Well, don't think of it, Florry; try not to. Don't let us talk of it to-night," said Charlie, seeing that a little thing would make her hysterical; "the doctor told me not to."

"But my dear bay," continued Florence; "whatever are we to do? We must tell uncle the truth, Charlie."

"Yes," said he, "we must; but as you are safe, Florry, he will bear it."

"But did the fall quite kill my pet?" said she. "Tell me, Charlie; don't be afraid; do, there's a dear fellow; you see I can bear it. Now do, Charlie; how was it?"

"Well, Florry, it was in this way," said Charlie. "When we came full cry across the lane, then it was that I first caught sight of you; not dreaming that you had not gone back long ago. Your horse was then up in the air, fighting; and before I could reach you, thinking he

would fall over with you, you lashed him with your whip, and he bounded over the fence and bolted.

"Carter followed, and I jumped it with him; and we both raced for very life to reach you; bearing to right and left of you, fearing he would go the faster if we were behind him. But there," said Charlie, "let it rest, Florry; it would be wrong of me to tell you now, for I can see you are too excited. It will only do you harm, dear. Let it be."

"No, tell me, tell me, Charlie; do tell me," said Florence. "You know you said you would, love, when I was calm. You promised me; and I am calm, and I will be calm. Now do, Charlie."

"Well," said Charlie, "outstripping Carter, then, I gained upon you, for my mare fled; when as I hoped that I should reach you, darling, I heard the whistle as I jumped the fence, and knew it was the express—the 12.15; and then I saw it sweeping towards us, and the bay horse racing, and you quite powerless to check or hold him.

"A ball rose in my throat as if to choke me; I felt spell-bound. I don't know what I did, or said, or shouted. I only know that I could give no help, when you most needed it and death seemed so certain! Oh, Florry, kiss me!"

And as she, sobbing, nestled closer to him, he told the rest.

"I spurred and spurred; did everything I could to reach you, Florry; when just as all seemed quite to swim before me, and your wild scream, love, hit me at the heart, I felt the dear mare springing to the spur, and touched you; and as the bay horse bounded for the rails, I swept you from him, and we fell together; and you, thank God, were saved! The mare went headlong, and the bay was killed."

She pressed him to her, for she could not speak, and kissed him through her tears.

"Come, cheer up, darling! don't you cry so, dear," said Charlie. "You have borne it all so well; now don't give way! Don't, Florry dear; you don't know how it grieves me to see you thus! Come, come, my darling! There now, dry your tears. There, kiss me."

When she was calmer, after a pause, he told what else remained.

It seemed that where they fell the ground was very soft and muddy, from a snow-drift thawed there; but the shock and pace had so far touched the heart, that the senses felt it; so that when the doctor came, he feared concussion, as they both lay motionless. But the station luckily was close at hand, and water and some brandy brought them to. Some cars were plying there, and one was brought, down through the meadow there, to where they were. And then, as soon as Florence had revived, Charlie, who was more queer himself than he would own, hurried her into it with the doctor; and getting in himself, they managed to take her away from there as quickly as possible, before she had time to realise much about it; for the bay lay dead, on the other side the line.

When he rose at the rails, as Charlie swept Florence from him, he cleared them, but fell upon the metals—it was a level length there—and being caught by the train, was hurled away and killed instantly.

The mare, hit by the bay, when Charlie, overbalanced, dropped with Florence, staggered; and catching in the reins that had been let go, fell headlong; and then lay there, half stunned and all of a heap, as the reins, which were round both her legs, pinned her head down.

As soon as Carter came, he cut the reins; for as Charlie and Florence lay insensible, he thought them dead. The doctor happened to be in the train, and saw them, as did others, fall together; so as the train stopped at the station, he jumped out, and ran down beside the line with the porters.

The mare the groom led home, after he had rested her and bathed her sides—scored terribly; and the body of the poor mangled bay was taken care of, until directions should be sent about it. The rest we know.

And as Charlie and Florence continued to sit together, she became less hysterical and calmer; and it was arranged between them that, when her uncle came down to tea, Charlie should break it to him as well as he could.

"Oh, Charlie," said Florence, as she kissed him as he pressed her to him, "how good you have been! I can never repay you, never, dear! You have saved my life!"

"To have it, darling, I hope, in my keeping."

Her uncle entered. She looked up and smiled, and then, with Charlie, she rose up to meet him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A GRAY DAY—THE BRIDGE AT HOLME WOOD.

THE middle of March was at hand. And the day had been a "gray day"—a day of driving rain, and of moving clouds; of bending rushes, and of wind-stirred water. Gray sky above, gray patches in the valley, from pools cloud-tinged. A blowing, showery, gusty sort of day, with shifting lights, and momentary change of sun and shade.

But towards the evening the gray in the sky rifted, and the rain ceased; the mistiness was dispelled, and the landscape showed again. For the only grays that remained were the gray of the cloud-shadows that came floating down the woods, and the gray strip that was left where the high hills met it; but there was blue sky over it, and white too, in the blue of it.

And the deep rich greens by the river were giving place to the yellow greens, that stole across them in the sunlight, with the long shadows of the poplars. The broad fallows too, where the wheat-sowers had been, were the browner for the wetting; and the teams were "ploughing down" in the hop-yards. And the wind that had buffeted the young lambs all the morning had dropped, and they were flirting about in the pastures; and the birds were singing.

There was a fresh smell of mould in the air, and a scent of wet shrubs and of flowers. And the leaves of the laurels were shiny, and the leaves of the hollies looked varnished; and there was a dripping from boughs that was pleasant, and a glittering of grass, as the cattle moved from under the trees to the open.

And there was a great cawing of rooks, and a crowing of pheasants, and a cooing of doves in the woods; and you could see the bright beady eyes of the squirrels as they moved in the branches above you. And the river looked deep blue and steel, and there was only a ripple upon it.

The spring was approaching.

The birds were building, and the coltsfoot was yellowing; the sloes were whitening, the greens were blending, and the chestnuts were unfolding; and the young red

leaves upon the oaks were changing bare stems to boughs. The yews and the alders were in flower, and the sorrels were showing; the mistletoe was in blossom, and there were buds on the hazels; the ground-ivy was blue-tipped, gold was on the willows, and bees were busy at the butter-burr. Daisies were plentiful and buttercups abounded; daffodils were by the water, primroses in the copses; the willow-wren had come; and all spring flowers were thickening.

And the big woods that came shelving down to the valley, jutting into black points of firs and yews, no longer looked upon a breadth of white; for the floods had subsided, and the only trace left of them was the line of dead sedge upon the banks, that showed where the water came, and the withered look of the grass where the mud had covered it. All besides was green, and bright green where the cattle were—the white-faced Herefords.

Ten days had elapsed since the events of the preceding chapter. And the old Squire had been told of the race and the rescue; and the bay was buried, Florence was herself again, and a new horse was promised her; and Burton had notoriety; for there had been particulars in the local papers of the rescue, and the neighbourhood had been full of it, to his great annoyance, and the general disturbance of his equanimity of temper. Archer was at Hazelwood, and Johnson was in town again; and as Mrs. Burton was away on a visit, Charlie was by himself at Boscabel.

So he thought he would have his bachelor friends to see him; and it was on the evening of that day that they were coming. Wells and Raymond, King and Dawson, Oliver and Andrews, Frank Freeman from the Liddiats, Griffin—Jemmy Griffin—from the Woodend, and Clifton, the doctor, from Aynsley, who had come up so opportunely at the time of the accident. He was a married man, but the rest, as we know, were bachelors. Archer begged off, and Johnson had an engagement; or else, as Charlie said, “there would just have been a dozen of them.”

And as the shadows of the poplars lengthened, and the sun came streaming down the meadows, catching the spray of the water as it leaped over the weir, Harry Wells rode over the bridge that was at the entrance to the village—the village of Holme Wood.

It was a tell-tale bridge; for whatever was said there or near there, or at the turnpike, or at the cottages beyond it, could be heard distinctly from the one to the other; so that a man need only come fishing there a few times to know all the gossip that was going on in that village, and to be quite as conversant with the inner life of the cottagers—their confidences and their grievances—as any of the inhabitants.

For with the exception of a few straggling cottages, the row on the bank constituted “the village!” and hence it was, that if those at the mill by the bridge could hear what was said at the cottages, the cottagers were quits; for they could tell the miller every day as to his callers and customers, and the quantity of flour and of other products that was ordered there.

Not that the roses named it to the honeysuckles, and the honeysuckles told the ivy, and the ivy repeated it to the briony, or that the briony blabbed it to the bushes, and the bushes let it out to the willows, and the willows whispered it to the poplars, and the poplars to the elms; for though such is the way in which news does generally get about—at least, if books are to be believed—it was not so in this instance; purity of atmosphere and relative position being all-sufficient for the purpose; and Nature was thus enabled to dispense with her usual system of telegraphic communication.

Altogether the bridge had its inconveniences as well as its advantages; and the unthinking couples who made it a trysting-place in the evenings never could really understand how it was that their fond utterances could be known, and repeated to them at “the shop,” word for word, when they went in there the next day for their little commodities; or that their kisses could be numbered and told to them. And so it was, that when the servant-girls about there were taken to task about their respective “goings-on,” when Echo was in fault, mistresses were blamed.

The fishermen, too, were sadly bothered by it when they came there for the grayling or trout fishing; for the exclamation of “Quick, Jack, he’s a big un!” would at once bring such a troupe of youngsters from the cottages, that the oncoming of the native infantry, by its noise and suddenness, would often result in the loss of the fish,

through the agitation of the rod-holder at the critical moment.

Still, if you were alone, it was a bridge worth lingering on in the daytime. At night it was certainly awkward, as we have shown; as old Martha, the gossiping old crone of the village, would listen if she caught a sound, and make her grandson a party to her propensities, by exclaiming, as soon as she was satisfied as to the cause thereof, "Who be that at the bridge, Jem? the crackers be agoin' off tremenjus!" And the base boy, after going out by the shed, would impart the result to the aged one, who repeating it to Matilda, "the shop" would have it, and the delinquents be exposed.

But it was a pretty bridge for all that; for it was a rough red-sandstone one, and crumbledy; and mosses grayed it, and ivy greened it, and spleenworts purpled it, and ferns grew on the ledges and grasses in the stones; and there were brambles in the crevices, and flood-lodged plants in the joinings; in fact, it was an untidy-looking bridge, and hence picturesque.

And its banks were coloured with forget-me-nots, and massed with burdocks; and the white blossoms of the bindweed, and the pink of the wild roses, clung together and clustered there. And there were shallows of golden sand that you could look down on from the parapet, and see the shadows of the trout there, as they poised motionless above them, or darted into the holes in the bank when you flipped the mortar off with your finger from between the stones, to startle them as it dropped.

Under the bridge too, at the bottom, were some large slabs, with trails of dank weed clinging to them, and lifting its lengths to the water. And the red showed through the white of the foam, and the stones split the current and drove it; and the swallows just dipped with their wings, and made little light circles about it. And you saw the blue distant hills up the river, and down it the sheep-walks and woods, where it wound under banks in deep shadow, or rippled along through the meadows, and made silver gleams next the green.

And the sky that had been so gray all the morning was now golden; and as the last gleams of the sun flashed across the tree-tops in the avenue at Boscabel, lighting up the oaks and reddening the fir boughs, Wells, who had

been calling at the mill, came up between the paddocks, and riding slowly on over the purple shadows, looked at the horses.

The old man was there too, old William; and, as a matter of course, he was full of information as to his young master, Mr. Charles, and well primed and ready for any occasion which should offer to impart it. And as he soon found that all Wells knew of the matter was from what he had seen in the papers, the old fellow did not miss the chance for a gossip.

"Is, sir," said he, "blood ool show itself. He comes o' the oud stock, sir, as fought for King Charles, when——"

"Yes," said Wells, shutting him up in time, "I have heard of it."

"Oh, sir," said old William, "theer be a dale o' blood in 'em; an' our young maister shows it. He be a good un, he be, sir," said he; "an' he be 'andy wi' his fisties too, sir; and that be alleys a good sign o' a true un. Not that he be quarrelsome-loike, sir; but when it be asked for, they can have it. Loike t'other daay, sir. Theer were a whipper-snapper sort o' a fellar, wi' some hair o' his lip, as were down by the mill a-fishin'; an' our Mary, sir, that be my niece—her be a prettyish sort o' gal, you know, sir," said the old man, "an' risin' sixteen—her were a-watchin' on him, an' a-standin' close by, innercent-like; when, darn me, sir, if the birch-broom o' a fellar dayn't think her were taken wi' him; an' he up and coteded hold on her an' kissed her, an' made her cry—her be but a young un, sir, an' timid—an' then, darn his body, he kissed her to stop her cryin', and kissed her agin arter that not to cry; an' so, sir, as it were agin her will, an' a stranger, her didna loike it. Well, sir," continued Will, "as her comes up to the bridge, the young maister comes over it. 'Why, Mary,' says he, sir—he be werry partial to our Mary, sir, be Maister Charles—'who's been a-puttin' you about? You looks as if you'd been a-cryin'; what be the matter ooth you?' So then he draws it out on her, sir. 'Indade,' says he, when her'd teld him; 'I ool just goo down an' see what he has to saay for hisself.' So he went down, sir; an' Mr. Whipper-snapper sings out, 'Oh, indade; an' who the'—you'll excuse me, sir, a-mentionin' his name—'are you, I'd like to know?' An' wi' that he sauced him. Well, sir, our Maister Charles he dunna like sauce; so he

says, 'If you get interfering ooth the girl agin'—'cos her had to go back thata waay, sir, arter her'd bin to the shop—'I'll put you into the river, rod an' all.' So the squirrel-tail, sir, got saucer still, an' got the maister's monkey up; so says Maister Charles, 'Put your rod down, you varmint, and take a thrashin'. It'll tache you manners, an' do you good;' an' wi' that, sir, he leathered him; an' in two minutes, sir, my gentleman had had enough on it. An' while he were a-growlin' about what he'd do, an' ood ha' the law on him, up comes Mary, sir; 'ecos her were obligated to goo that waay, sir, as her'd done her errand—three ounces o' tay, an' a pound o' short sixes, sir, an' a bit o' snuff for the grandmother—so Maister Charles says to him, sir, 'Now, look here, my fine fellar, herebe the gal, an' as you dunna seem to 'a had enough on it, tell her you be sorry, or I'll pitch you in the river; an' you mun gie her a shillin' too, to buy her a new cap for towslin' on her;' an' he did so; but he warn't long, Mary said, arter that afore he were round the corner, an' his rod ooth him.

"So you see, sir," said old Will, "when I heerd o' the maister, I knowed it were true; as if he put hissself about in thata waay for a poor girl, why, he'd put his mare an' hissself about for a rich un, as ool live to be our young missis some daay, I hopes, sir, plase the Lord, as I reckuns her be a beauty. I'se sid her."

"Yes, I believe she is nice-looking, William," said Wells; "but I don't know as to the rest. I fancy he is like myself, a confirmed old bachelor."

"No fear, no fear, sir," said William; "it'll come true one o' these daays, mind me if it dunna. Ah, sir, he be a sharp un, be Maister Charles; but he conna desave an old mon loike me. Look you here, sir," said he; "what do he goo a-talkin' to the Welshman for as come by ooth the drove, to pick him up 'two good-looking ponies,' small uns, Welsh uns; an' what be he a-tryin' a new bay horse wi' the side-saddle for, sir, if theer wanna somethin' agate? An' what be the use o' the mountain ponies if they aynt to be broke, an' theer be chilthren to put on 'em?"

"I dunna moind," said the old fellow, "a-tellin' you, sir, 'ecos you be a gintleman; but it be a woife an' twins—if so be, at laste, it be a good year o' nuts, an' double uns—as he be a-lookin' forward to, that be what it be, sir, mark my words;" and the old man chuckled at his know-

ingness, and stocked the road with renewed vigour. "Oh, she be a werry nice young ooman by all accounts, sir," continued he, "an' quite the lady."

"So I understand," said Wells; "but as to marrying, I don't think, William, that has entered his thoughts yet."

"Ah, he be a sly un, he be, be Maister Charles; but mum's the word, sir," said William; "for here he be, a just lookin' the colts over a bit." And as he spoke Charlie spied Wells, and came on down the avenue to meet him.

"You are late, Harry," said he, as they went up to the house, for Wells had promised to come early, so as to look round a bit.

"Yes, I am, Charlie," he replied, "but there was a sale on up our way, at the Bannot Farm; and as I wanted a couple of Alderneys for the pasture next the house, I went."

"Did you buy?" said Charlie.

"I did," said Wells; "two nice-coloured ones. There were some Scotch there, too, prime West Highland ones, that went for a lot of money. Well, how are you, old fellow, after your gallop? I saw it in the papers. An escape for both of you."

"Yes, confound them," said Burton; "a simple incident, but made sensational. The next time they put me in the papers, I hope they will say less about me."

"Unless, Charlie," said Wells, "it should be such an occasion that they would be obliged to say more. There are rumours, you know, that you are tired of bachelor life."

"Don't believe them, Harry," said Charlie, as the groom touched his hat and took the horse to the stables. "My mother is away," said he, "on a visit, so you must excuse shortcomings. Come in!"

And they went on upstairs to see some photographs that Charlie had had taken of his colts. And the room they went into was "Charlie's own room," as his mother called it—his "snuggery;" where brushes, hunting-horns, dog-collars, whips, and sporting pictures, both in oil and water, hung on the walls; and guns and fishing-rods were in the corners; and various odds-and-ends and books and papers littered the room.

"What did you do that day?" said Harry Wells, while they were waiting for the other comers.

"Not much," said Burton. "We drew the Home Wood, as you saw, no doubt, but failed to find; when just as Will was drawing off with hounds, a Tally O! was heard down at the end, where were some rushes by an old pool-tail. Some man had walked a fox up that hounds drew over. So then Will rattled him; but the people mobbed him, and he could not bolt. At length he went; and though the fellows there shied hats and caps, he made his way and pierced the line, and dropped down for the meadows."

"A game fox that," said Wells.

"He had no choice," said Charlie; "it got too hot for him. Well, the din was awful; but hounds soon settled to the scent and went it. Do you know that country?"

"Just round Coombe Hill I do," said Wells; "but not much farther."

"We ran from there," said Burton, "and in a line with it, to Brinksty Gorse, a thickish patch of over sixty acres, bordered by fir plantations at the sides. Through this they pushed him on to low-lying ground, where the top was ant-tumps, and the bottom rushes; so we had to pick it," said he; "and thence to meadows that still were sloppy from the recent floods; the river winding through them for some miles. The fox went through it, and the hounds swam over. A cattle-bridge, a swing one, being handy, we tabbered over it and got to hounds, and then came 'grief.'"

"Soddened and wet, the ground was very heavy, and the taking off as bad, and right before us was a line of rails, and no way out but that. I slipped along a ridgy bit," said Charlie, "and did it; a dry take off; but Harris went below—John Harris of the Fen—where, being flat, it was as bad as any bog, so he came down; and Dacent caught a top rail, and so got hit hard on the nose; and some one else—I did not look to see who was the victim—came down not far from me a perfect thud, in sound a stopper. Jenkins was by me, so we had a race over a yawning bank, with ditch for drop; I first," said Charlie. "He did it though, and well. Then came a grip, and that we did, and very decently. Then some light fences; then a gorsy common—hounds running well, and pretty well together—that stretched to woods that hung upon the hills; and there we checked. So most of them got up.

"Well," continued Burton, "we threaded through the gorse and by the pools; gipsies and donkeys getting in the way. 'Get on,' cried Will, 'and well thong those Jerusalems;' and George, who was behind us rating hangers, came forward at a canter. 'Their beastly hoofs will cripple half the pack; they're brutes at hounds,' said he. Free from the gorse and past the turf beyond, we reached the woods; and then we found him.

"The fox had gone straight for the woods, as we all thought at first, but sheep had stopped the scent; so running hard we went out at the end, pointing for Aynsley hills, where in a green lane that we crossed with hounds, I saw Miss Mills, who there was fighting with her little bay, that flecked with foam, and furious that he was held, was trying all he could to unseat his rider. You know the rest," said Charlie.

"It seemed that after we found," said he, "instead of going home, as she promised, they had been jogging on quietly—she and the groom—just merely on the listen, thinking that hounds might turn, as we were running dead against the wind, and so give her a gallop in the lanes, as they went home again; and when hounds slewed round and bore along towards them, the bay got wild—hearing their crash and coming—and hence the race; a lucky race for her."

"It was," said Wells; "thanks to your good mare, Charlie. The nearest shave I think I ever heard of."

"Don't let us talk of it," said Charlie, "now; for when I think of it, it makes me creep. 'Twas awful, Harry!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BACHELOR'S PARTY AND THE DOCTOR'S STORY.

ALL came to dinner but the Aynsley doctor, and he came after; a case detained him; and he found them at their wine, and very merry. Of course the chatter turned upon the race; but seeing Charlie shirked it they did not press it. But during the evening some remark was made that recalled an incident connected with it.

It seemed that when they were at the station, a brawny navvie, with a clay-stained shirt, came up just as the car

was leaving, and claimed acquaintance with the doctor, Clifton, who then shook hands with him. Seeing Charlie smile, the doctor said, "A friend; I will tell you all about him some day, Burton; for thereby hangs a tale."

"So, doctor," said Charlie, "may I, without offence, ask you a question?"

"Yes; fifty if you like," said Mr. Clifton.

"Well, who's your fat friend, the man who claimed acquaintance at the station? You said you would tell me some fine day or other."

"Oh, the navvie," said the doctor; "I saw you smile. His name is Dosset, a railway ganger, and an old acquaintance. I had not seen him—oh, for many years; but it seems that he still follows his old calling. Having a railway contract up the country, he is down here seeking 'hands.' I told him," said the doctor, "to call round upon the morrow, and have a talk about old times and things."

"A queer name that of Dosset?" Burton said.

"Turbill or Turbeville is his real name," said Mr. Clifton; "but they call him Dosset, as he says, 'for short,' being a Dorsetshire man. He was head ganger to a lot of navvies."

"And how came you to know him?" Charlie said.

"By his giving me a lift in early days," was the reply.

"He! he give you a lift!" said Charlie, with astonishment.

"Yes, Burton," said the doctor, "he! He did it too; but to explain how would make a long tale of it; so I will not now inflict it on you or on these gentleman, as it would not particularly interest any of you."

However, pressed to do so by those present, he at length complied, and it was to this effect:

That after passing the college he settled in the west of England, at Witford, a small manufacturing town, full of sharp turns, steep pitches, and with plenty of machinery; all of which he thought likely to bring in patients.

Taking a corner house through the suggestion of his old governor—"When you settle, sir, take a 'corner'—a good direction, and fractures likely"—he waited day after day the incoming of his first patient, but the only one who did come was an old woman for a few cough pills; but still it was "a patient," and they were duly and on the spot

entered in a large day-book. However, one patient followed another; but they were not of much account, and grist to the mill was badly wanted.

Near to the town a new line of railway was in course of construction; but the other surgeons had secured the contracts for attendance upon the men. When one evening as he was down in the dumps, and half regretting having a lease of his house—for he had done very little and had only had one “decent accident,” as he said, since he came—he saw by the paper that the long viaduct was shortly to be commenced; and he fancied he saw daylight.

The next night too, Saturday, was, it seemed, “pay night” with the navvies; that he knew from the other surgeons; and the house where they paid, the Mason’s Arms, was but three miles or so from the town; so he thought he would go there and see the ganger, and possibly something might turn up. So he went, nasty night though it was; and turning up the collar of his pilot, he jogged along through the mud and rain, for he had not yet commenced to keep a horse, not seeing his way clearly to the use of one.

On reaching the place he found he had to go further, three miles on, as they had “shifted their pay-house,” so he was half inclined then and there to turn back again; but the thought that something might result that would be of use to him impelled him onwards, and he at length arrived at the house, tired out.

The name of the place was the Dog and Duck, and a queer-looking place it was; being the half of a ruined old house, that was patched up into an ale-house, and dignified by the title of “inn;” and there was a queer lot there also. Resenting his entrance as an intruder, and finding that they considered the place for that night as their club-room, he pacified them by ordering in some ale for them when he ordered something warm for himself; as he had a consciousness of having caught a very large cold in the venture. So lighting a Manilla, and settling down in as unconcerned a manner as he could assume, he looked round him, and scrutinized the company.

In the room, and sitting round the fire, were some forty or fifty navvies, bare-throated, bare-armed, and brawny; with clay-stained clothes and muddy boots. With them were half a dozen hang-dog-looking fellows, in rusty velve-

teen jackets, with deep pockets, that bespoke the poacher; and in the corner, fast asleep, was a big black-whiskered man of Herculean build—the ganger, Dosset.

Finding what a set he had dropped into, the doctor wished himself far enough; but the rain was coming down so straight outside, that to face a six miles' walk until it ceased was out of the question; so he had to make the best of it, and bad was the best. After encountering sundry rebuffs in his attempts to enter into conversation, and having to put up with them, the ganger, when he awoke, began to get rusty, for when he was in drink he was quarrelsome; and he asked, or rather demanded, his business. So he told him; and that if, when the extra men were put on, they required a doctor, if they liked to send to him, he would do his best for them; the contracts of the other surgeons being for different portions of the line.

Seeing that the doctor was fidgety at the close proximity of some dogs to his heels, the woman who was waiting on them, an over-dressed and brassy-looking personage, ordered the poaching-looking fellows to "shift them;" so the dogs were kicked out, as the men knew she would make them go themselves if they were not. She was the wife of the landlord, one Robert Bingham, familiarly known as Bob Binks; a man who had been abroad at his country's expense, and who gave the place a worse name than even his predecessor; in fact, as the doctor found afterwards, it was the resort of all the scamps in the neighbourhood.

But it will here be better to let the doctor tell the tale himself.

"When I told him I was a doctor," said Mr. Clifton, "'You be!' cried he, considerably astonished, and scrutinising me from head to foot—'Gammon!'"

"That was a nasty one," said Burton.

"'Fact,' said I. 'My name is Clifton—Clifton of Witford, 26, Gresham Road, the corner house, well known and easy to find.'

"The black-whiskered one," said he, "eyed me suspiciously, took a few whiffs at his pipe, and then laying it down, began with the greatest deliberation to take off his coat; he being almost the only one who had not removed it. This proceeding, uncertain of what was coming, I viewed," said the doctor, "not without some inward fear

of the action of that splendid biceps of his being speedily brought into play upon my person.

"‘Now, then,’ said he, stripping up his sleeve, and still keeping his eyes fixed upon me, ‘if you be a doctor, you can tell what’s been the matter with my arm; and if you bain’t, why, we’ll give you “one for luck” for telling lies.’”

“Pleasant, certainly,” said Charlie.

“What that ‘one’ was,” said Mr. Clifton, “was too evident; but before I could reply, a big brawny fist was presented right in my face, with the sharp stentorian cry of ‘Catch hold!’”

“As,” continued the doctor, “the wisest course with a half-drunken giant like that, and with helpmates round him, was to grin and bear it, I set my teeth, and clutched the limb.

“Grasping it firmly, and with some difficulty tracing the bone through the mass of muscle that covered it, I found,” said the doctor, “that it had been fractured at its middle third; and judging from the amount of ‘callus’—new bone, Burton—perceptible to the touch, I surmised that he had not long been able to use it. ‘Broken arm here,’ said I, catching him tightly at the point in question. ‘Wrong,’ cried he; ‘you’re out of it!’ ‘I am not only not out of it,’ I quietly said, ‘but I will make a near guess how long it is since you did break it.’ ‘You will?’ said he. ‘Yes,’ I said. ‘It is not less than six weeks, and not more than eight.’ ‘Well, I’m blowed, but you’ve hit it!’ was the reply. ‘It’s just seven weeks to-morrow.’”

“While engaged in this examination,” said the doctor, “the men had thronged round us, and were now evidently bent on also putting my knowledge to the test. As the ganger resumed his seat, one of the velveteens came up, and put out his hand, on the back of which was a projection, that I at first thought was a bursa; but which, on examining, I found to be a partial dislocation of the os magnum—one of the bones, Burton. ‘Bone out; done fighting,*eh?’ I asked. The man, smiling, slunk off without replying; one of his companions observing, ‘Hillo, Jem, how about the keeper?’”

“Arms were then held out, backs of heads presented, and legs stuck upon the table; their respective owners all talking at once, and clamouring for information.

"Being now well in for it," continued the doctor, "I saw that my only plan was to try to seem good-humoured, and to put up with it. 'What's this, mister?' said one, baring a puffy knee, and bringing his heel down with a bang upon the table, that made him wince again, and showed me symptoms of approaching synovitis. 'Why, you have got inflammation of the joint,' I said; 'and if you don't rest it and shirk the drink, you will have a mess with it.' 'There, now, I told you so; but you'll never be ruled,' said the ganger. 'Here, feel my leg; how long is it since I broke it?' was asked by another, one of the roughest. 'Ay, tell him, and then you shall have a guess at my ribs,' said a third. 'And my foot,' said a fourth. 'Really, my good fellows,' said I, for I began to feel far more nervous at passing their examination than I did in my examination at the college—and no wonder, with that 'one' in store for me if I failed—'it is impossible to tell you how long ago you have been hurt! You may just as well expect me to inform you if the man in the moon has been vaccinated, and whether he has had the measles. If you will ask me what is the matter with you, I will tell you.'

"However, it was in vain," said the doctor, "that I remonstrated; and I had to get through it as well as I could; a lucky guess in most instances favouring me as to time.

"I had now examined nearly every man there," said he, "and had made lucky shots with most of them; but there were a few half-drunken fellows who still were doubtful, because I could not tell how long it was since Bill Hayes broke his ribs; and it was 'not more than seven years ago.' If I were a real doctor, said they, I could have told them. Confound the wretches, I thought, let them go to the deuce! It serves me perfectly right for submitting to be schooled by such a set of brutes. But then the rain still came down, and if I only could get elected as their surgeon, it might be a good stepping-stone; so," said the doctor, "I set my teeth harder than ever, and waited till the rain ceased.

"How it would have ended," said he, "is hard to say, for I was getting rather savage, and out of patience; but at this juncture in came the landlord, the renowned Bob Binks, dripping wet as to his coat, but dry under. 'Glad

to see you, sir,' said he, after looking at me a time or two, 'seed you afore, sir; know'd you again directly.' He was a red-nosed, pimple-faced, long-waistcoated individual," said the doctor, "whose remarkably short legs, and peculiarity of vest, gave you the idea that the coppers he was so constantly diving after, came out of his knees. 'Thank you,' said I, replying to him; 'I was not aware of it.' 'Oh yes,' said he; 'I was the man as helped to bring that gentleman in, sir, as was hurt at the corner.' 'What, Gibson?' said I. 'Yes, sir,' said he; 'I'd come to Witford that morning to see some men, and he passed me in the street, going at a most awful pace; and bang he had it against the wall, and over he went a good un! The horse was dead, and the trap was in smithereens; so I picked him up, sir, and brought him in.' 'Ah,' said I," continued Mr. Clifton, "'he put his shoulder out, and dislocated his wrist. I wondered he had not broken it.' 'My eyes, sir,' said the fellow, 'didn't you just put him right, though, soon? Quickest thing I'd seen, and I'd seen a few;' and he proceeded to give a glowing account of my skill and quickness; answering the doubting ones by remarking, that 'if he warn't a real doctor, he couldn't ha' done it!'

"That settled it," said the doctor; "so as the rain then ceased, and the ganger was half asleep, I left; with a sort of half admission that perhaps they 'might' send to me, but still nothing definite.

"A week afterwards, however," said he, "one of the men had a heavy truck pass over his foot while he was at work, and the ganger, who was by at the time, sent for me. I jumped into a car, and lost no time about it; dressed the foot—which, strange to say, was not broken, Burton—fraternised with the ganger, and returned full surgeon-in-ordinary to the navvies aforesaid."

"Tally O! hark forrard! yoicks, yoicks! Tally O!" shouted Charlie; and their glasses clinked musical honours for the victory.

"Well, that started me," said the doctor, laughing. "In a few weeks afterwards they commenced the long viaduct, and increased their number of men to two hundred and forty. As the works proceeded, several accidents occurred, for it was a dangerous place; and by some mysterious means, my name frequently appeared in the papers——"

"You did not know how, of course?" said Burton, smiling.

"Giving me in a short time plenty of notoriety, to which I soon added increased popularity; for the navvies—really a decent set, rough as they were—did not fail to tell others their opinion of me; and the ganger, Dosset, when we came thoroughly to know each other, proved to be one of the best-hearted men I ever met with; in fact," said the doctor, "to his incessant, but really honest, praise of me to all he met with, I may safely say the greater part of my practice was really due."

"Quite a trump card!" said Burton.

"Yes," said the doctor, "he was. I soon bought a horse; and in six months," said he, "I bought another, for I had then full work for two.

"Well, I stayed there, Burton, ten years; and then, having in the mean time settled—you know my wife, I think?—I decided, as my circumstances were somewhat altered, to take it quietly, and try to blend a little relaxation with work. So I sold my practice, came to Aynsley, and here I am; spinning you a long yarn about Dosset, and how I got my appointment, and who were my examiners. Burton, your health," said the doctor. "Gentlemen, your good health." And, glad he had finished his say, Mr. Clifton attacked the walnuts.

"I think," said he, after they had laughed over his adventure, "that a long speech like that is worth a song in return."

"Decidedly," said Burton.

"Then will you give us one?" said the doctor.

And seeing that he was in for it, Charlie, with his musical voice, plunged at once into "Philip the Falconer."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PEYTON ARMS—PAST AND PRESENT.

"JOHNSON," said Archer, as they were busy amongst the paint-pots at Hazlewood, a few days after Charlie's bachelor's party, "I vote we turn out now, old fellow, for I deserve a holiday. I consider that I have done a very fair morning's work; and these hounds are coming out so satis-

factorily, that I think," said he, "two days more will finish them. So when you have finished touching up those heads, if you like we will start."

"All right, any time you like," said Johnson, as he laid down his crayon, and handed the sheet to Archer, with "Which of those comes best, John, the centre one or the top one?"

"Well," said Archer, scrutinising the heads upon it, "they are all like Rose, but I think that is the best one," said he, pointing to the one in the centre. "But don't you Greuze it too much now, or you will spoil it. A face like hers, Johnson, does not want idealising. Nature has done enough for her; so be satisfied. Come, then," said he, taking "Will and the Hounds" off the easel, and putting it down, face to the wall, "let us be off. Will you bring your block—you might get something perhaps?"

"Yes, I think I will," said Johnson; "but where are you going to?"

"Well, up to the village first," said Archer, "to the Peyton Arms; and then, wherever you like afterwards. I want to see the landlord there. He sent to ask Brandon if he could manage to 'turn in' for him from Saturday to Monday, as he is short of room himself. He has a drove of Welsh cattle and some horses coming through for the fair, and he can manage the horses, but not the cattle; so he wants to tack them in here, as they could pick them up as they come by; so I must see him, and know what he offers."

"Very well," said Johnson; "anywhere; it is all the same to me."

So the brushes and colours were put aside, and they started. The general aspect of the village has been described, and the Peyton Arms stood at the entrance to it.

"Where is your master?" said Archer to one of the men at the door, as they came up to it, after a two miles' walk by the brook and the meadows.

"He be gone to the parson's, sir. His pigs be pounded," said the man.

"And how long will it take to tell him about the pigs?" said Archer.

"Depends what he axes him to have, sir," was the reply. "If summut 'short,' he'll soon put it down; but if it be in a jug, he'll hang at it."

"Well, how long do you suppose?" said Archer,

"Conna saay," said the fellow; "not a moighty whoile maybe, sir, 'eccos he oona miss his tay, an' that be at four."

"Well, let us take a turn round," said Archer; "I hate these places, Johnson, and we cannot go in without having something."

"That will suit me, John, exactly," said Johnson.

So they left, and went up through the village, Johnson spying any quantity of good material in the half-timbered houses and cottages, and lots of models: sun-tanned, shock-headed, "Hunt"-looking youngsters, artistically ragged, and with "grandfeyther's" clothes on, cut to fit them; and juveniles of both sexes, booked by him for a future day. And then, turning to the right at the top of the village—Coombe Hill—beyond the big elm, they crossed into the fields, to take in the surroundings and the back buildings; and so returned to the inn through the stable-yard, where Johnson had his eyes on a "bit" at once; a portion of the older building, left as it was when the front was faced, and valuable for the good form and colour it possessed, in the shape of projecting gables, mossed tiles, and stained plaster-work.

"So," said Johnson, "you go in, Archie, and do what you have to do; and I will camp here and get this." So Archer went.

"He is not yet returned," said Archer, as he came back; "so we must wait a bit. Perhaps when you have finished your sketch, and put in that good-looking girl who is at the window, he will be. It comes well, old man," said he.

"Now, Mary," said an old fellow, who was at the back of them, a "helper" there, and who was watching the process, "you goo on wi' your broom; youn had your pictur took afore, you know, an' you ought to be satisfied. Her were took last week, sir," said the man, explaining, "by a gentry sort o' a man, as were a-takin' off that oud bit, as you be doin' on, sir; her stuck herself in the windey, sir, an' now her thinks to be took agin."

"Never mind him, Mary," said Johnson; "you are a pretty girl, and I will put you in;" words that caused Mary to blush and vanish.

"Now, stupid," said the fellow to a lad who was looking on, "right them gears on the filler, ool you? Darn the

lads, how they does bother a body! They'se no more braains than Daft John, who sowed needles to grow iron bars, and ood strut like a crow i' the gutter about it. An' be you in this part o' the country, sir?" said he, turning to Archer.

"You see I am, don't you?" was the reply.

"An' how be the young lady and Maister Eddut, at the Grange, sir? I hanna bin theer a merciful long whoile."

"Oh, quite well, quite well. What do you know about it?" said Archer.

"Well, sir, I oughter kneow," said the fellow; "I worked for your feyther, sir."

"You did?" said Archer. "How long ago? He has been dead some years."

"Is, sir, he has; and so has Mayster George; him as were i' the Guards in Lunnun, sir; an' a foine-grown chap he were too."

"Yes," said Archer; "George died before I left school, and Harriet."

"Ay, her were a nice young ooman too, sir. You an' her, sir, used to run me roun' the shrubbery, when I'd pretend to cut awaay wi' the rabbits. I did the walks an' the borders, sir, when you was that high, sir," said the man, stooping down, with his hand a foot from the pitching. "I lived about theer then, sir."

"And what is your name, my man?" said Archer.

"Todd, sir," was the reply. "Tom Todd 'the foighter,' it used to be, sir; but them good oud days be gone, sir."

"And a good thing too," said Archer.

"I were one o' the javelin-men, sir—thirty on us—when your feyther were High Sheriff, sir; an' my feyther were ditto to his feyther—your grandfeyther, sir—a good-sorted oud man he were too, sir; an' I went wi' him to the 'Sizes."

"You did?" said Archer.

"Is, sir," replied Todd, "an' ooth the trumpeters, sir, o' the Sunday, to the 'thedral. An' arter sarvis, sir, we went up to the jaail to see the prisoners through the bars. That were the oud jaail, sir, as be tooked down now, sir; an' the two men as were gwain to be hung for horse-staling; but the jaailer didna come among us wi' the boot for ha'pence, for showin' on 'em, loike he did in my feyther's toime. I dayn't see 'em turned off, though; for the daay

they was hung I had to goo to the pits for coal for the mayster; that were him at the farm, sir, Squire Danby, as be dead now; an' the team rund awaay, as they all said were a judgment on him for not lettin' me goo to see the soight. Theer were maany hung in them days, sir; a great maany."

"So I believe," said Archer. "How are you getting on, Johnson?" said he, looking over his shoulder. "Yes, it will make a sketch."

"Is, sir," continued the fellow; "poor Jem Hood got it then too; seven year, sir, to Bottomey Baay—that were wheer they sent 'em to then, sir—for leatherin' Moike Passy."

"And what had Mike Passy done that he had to be 'leathered'?" said Archer.

"Why, sir, for one thing," said Todd, "he'd hid his bits and bridles i' the tallet, an' put the curb-chaain i' the corn-bing—he were groom, sir, and t'other were wagoner—o' purpose to throw Jem late o' hunting mornin', which it did, sir, and set the mayster swearin'; which in course he were obligated to do, as a-puttin' of him about, sir, up one soide and down the t'other; an' Jem didna loike it. So he says, says he—because, sir, the mayster had stopped 'em a toime or two a-wranglin' an' a-foightin' i' the rick-yard, or behind the kid-poile—"Just you stop, my lad o' wax, till we goos in for Lawless, an' then I'se have it out wi' you."

"And who was Lawless?" said Archer.

"Lawless, sir? he were a hour, he were, sir," said Todd, "as we alleys had when we went into the town the daay the High Baayliff were 'lected; they dayn't have none o' them Mares in them daays, sir. You see, sir," said he, "the oud un were off an' the new un wern't on, by rayson o' his havin' to be swored in; so as a sorter trate, an' to git the payple loike him, he used to gie 'em a hour—that were fro' twelve to one, sir—to divart theirselves, and jist do as they loiked, sir; as much as to saay, sir, 'Goo it, my boys; theer be no law now!'"

"Don't let us hinder you," said Archer, who did not seem particularly interested in the doings.

"No harm done, sir," said the fellow; "I be a-waaaitin' for mayster."

So there was no help for it, as they could not order him off, but to let him wind himself up at his leisure. So

finding he was not interrupted, he continued ; putting in a word of admiration now and then, as Johnson sketched the building, and brought it out bit by bit.

"An' we used to goo it, sir."

"What, fight?" said Archer,

"In coorse," said Todd. "Why, you oodna ha' had us miss the chance, ood you, sir? But we pelted first, an' fit arterwards."

"Pelted?" said Archer.

"Is sir; wi' opples, loike mad! The townsfolk agin we folk; the commoners agin the gentry. All the windies was took out o' the houses i' the High Strate, sir, so as they shouldna be broken, to stan' back i' their rooms, an' pelt us.

"Well, sir, afore the hour were up, we alleys began to settle our little differences by a friendly foight, as put us square-loike to start agin; an' then, as the clock struck one, we stopped leatherin' each other, so as to pitch into the specials—that were the special constables, sir—an' that were the crame o' the puddin', that were; 'ecos if we didna get theer staffs, we soon had theer sticks—long uns, sir, as they held i' theer hands i' the front of 'em, to maake a road loike for the gentry. So then we had summut to foight wi'.

"'Now,' says Moike, as he throw'd his cap i' the air, as soon as we was tired o' peltin'—he were a Irishman, he were, sir, leastways his mother were—'horoo for a foight, my lads. Come,' says he, 'an' have your leatherin', Jem, loike a man!' An' at it they went, sir. Well, sir, whether it were Moike were toired—for he'd been havin' a free foight wi' his friends, instead o' peltin', as bein' better sport—or Jem were the best man, I dunnow; howsomever, Jem licked him; and the last roun' he had he went down o' the dollup; and he didna foight not no more. So his payple got drunk over him that noight, an' made a very pretty wake on him, sir; an' they buried him dacently when the time come."

"Why, God bless me," said Archer, turning sharp round on him, "you don't mean to say he killed the man?"

"Oh no, sir," said Todd, "he didna kill him; but arter the last toime loike he rund agin Jem's fisties, he never didna spake not no more."

"Did they hang the vagabond for it?" said Archer.

"In coorse not, sir! No," said Todd; "they said it wern't worth more nor seven year, as it were only slaughter; an' he were aggerawated to do it. So he went to Bottomey, sir; an' iver since he comed back—he works at the quarry up yonder, sir; he be a loime-stacker—he's gone by the naame o' 'Lawless'—Jem Lawless. But when he comed back," continued the fellow, "that game was all up, sir."

"And quite time for it," said Archer.

"For what wi' stones when you hadna opples, an' the gooin' it arter the hour, an' arter dark—so as to gie the glaziers a turn, sir, arter the windies was put in—'cos they was very koind to us, sir, an' stood drink for it—theer were such a shindy i' the town, that arter they'd had the yeomanry, an' oonst the reg'lars in, two or three years, to quiet us, the Baayliff gie it up, an' oodna let us have not no more on it."

"I don't wonder at it," said Archer, as he sharpened the pencil for Johnson.

"So then theer were no chance, sir," said Todd, "for them as waanted a foight, 'cept i' the winter, when the morrisers was about—them's the dancers, sir—the boatmen an' bargemen off the Siver, sir, as comed about wi' ribbins when the frost stopped 'em, an' hit sticks together to the tune whilst they danced. Well, sir, they was rare good hands at a foight, they were; and bein' friendly sort o' chaps, they was willin' to obleege a fellow at any toime; so when we know'd fro' the butterwomen as they was about loike, we ood git a daay off fro' mayster o' 'particular business,' an' goo in, sir; an' by maakin' the best use o' the toime, sir, we generally," said he, "got enough foightin' to last us a whoile."

"Friendly, did you say?" asked Archer.

"Quoite friendly, sir," replied Todd. "Oh yes. For as soon as we could well leather our mon, we'd handle him loike a babby, as tender as could be, an' stan' cups roun'. Oh yes, all friendly, sir; no malice, only we hit hard!"

"You liked a fight, then, in your younger days?" said Archer.

"Well, a scrimmage nows and thens, sir, stirred the blood a bit, and we couldna," said he, "git much o' it in the country; leastways it were better loike when it were a towns chap, 'ecos them towns chaps, you see, sir, used to

taake on theerselves; so we had to tabber 'em a bit to keep 'em in boun's."

"And did they not come from town to 'tabber' you, as you call it?" said Archer.

"When the Maay-poles was up they did, sir," said Todd; "but they be tooked down now, sir, all but that theer one o' the hills, wheer the shingley spoire be, an' the road inds. 'Ind o' the World' we calls it, sir; no road in it don't goo nowheer; they all stops theer."

"Do you mean the hamlet of Endall?" said Archer.

"That be him, sir," said Todd; "wheer theer be a big green, an' a pound, an' a pool i' the road by an old farmhouse."

"I never was there," said Archer, "but I have heard tell of it."

"Well," continued Todd, "they comed theer a few toimes, sir, but it be a ockard sort o' a plaaiice; an' the last toime they got i' the oods, sir, when the drink were in 'em, an' the owls theer well-noigh frightened 'em to death; so they didna come agin.

"So it be werry taame nowadays, sir, an' me an' the young folk—moi sons be faamous foighters, sir—we only goos 'ecos the parson up theer, who's one o' the old sort, sir, an' 'a true blue,' says it a rellit o' old toimes, an' he'll keep it up. So he gies us a trate, sir; an' he foinds the flowers, an' we drinks his health and dances o' the green; but as he oona let we foight, it be poor sport, sir; an' if it werena for the chance o' a bit o' up-an'-down as the youngsters has i' the dingles, amongst theerselves loike, as we comes home, we shouldna goo; but they foights theer best, an' we sends the cap roun' for 'em."

"But don't you think that all that fighting is very brutal?" said Archer.

"Brutal, sir?" said Todd. "Well, I don't rightly know the manin' on it; but if it be your gentry name for noice, sir, it be brutal, very brutal indeed, sir. That be why I loikes it."

"Exactly," said Archer; "so I thought, Todd."

"Now then," said the fellow, shouting to a man in the road, who stopped to look at them, "what be you a-starin' at? Goo on, Crocky, or I'll gie you kellums;" and the man went on with a growl.

"What in the world is 'kellums'?" said Archer,

laughing, as the truck-load of crockery-ware vanished round the corner.

"Kellums, sir," said Todd, "be a larrupin'."

"Oh," said Archer, "not a leathering, nor a licking, then?"

"No, sir," said he; "a larrupin' begins wi' a quiltin' an' ends wi' a leatherin'; if so be as it be required, sir."

"I see," said Archer; "but why 'kellums'?"

"Well, sir," said Todd, "when I were in Staffordshire, at the pits theer, we used to goo to Kellums the day they crabbed the parson. It was a little bit o' a chapel-place, down i' a dip o' the hills, wi' a big ood roun' it. An' we used to pelt him wi' crabs fro' his doore to the porch; an' them as owed him a grudge, picked the hardest, so as to gie it him stiff. An' it were foine fun to see him cut," said Todd.

"What a singular custom!" said Archer. "How came that about?"

"Why, sir," said he, "the parson one day—whether he'd stole 'em o' the road at a cottage, or whether he'd brought 'em ooth him, to ate i' the vestry, nobody know'd; but he'd got some dumplin's up his sleeve, sir; an' so the tale goos, sir, when he comes to 'Let us praay,' an' down goos his arms, bang he hits the clerk o' his yud, sir, wi' one of 'em. 'Good Lord deliver us,' says he, a-mistakin', as it were, his turn to goo on, an' a-lookin' up at the parson savage, sir. Well, soon arter that, bang he has him agin, with another, jist o' the nape o' his neck, sir; as fetched him up on end immajutely. 'Good Lord deliver us,' said he agin, an' banged the book o' the cushin, seein' as the folks was a-larfin'.

"Well, sir, that passed," said Todd, "when jist as they was all a-settlin' down loike steady, an' the parson stood up to gie out his text, whack he has him agin, pat o' the cheek. 'Oh,' says the clerk, 'if that be your game, parson, come on;' an' wi' that, sir, he gies him one atween the eyes wi' a crab—he had a lot on 'em i' his pocket, sir, as he'd picked a-comin', for the chilthren at home to play ooth. An' as long as them crabs lasted, sir, the oud parson got it hot, the payple siding ooth the clerk, an' a-larfin'."

"A very nice state of things, indeed," said Archer.

"Is, it were, sir," said Todd; "they all said so. Is," said he, chuckling, "it were werry noice indade, sir, whoile it

lasted, as it were great fun to see him dodge i' the pilpit, an' the crabs a-flyin' loike balls at Waterloo, sir. I'se heerd my feyther saay as a uncle o' hisn were theer, an' sin it, sir. Well, sir," continued he, "when the toime comed roun' agin, that daay next year, the payple thought they'd get the start on him, an' so waaited for him; an' fro' that day to this—well, not 'sackly to this, but I remember it, sir, they used to gie it him koind fro' his doore to the church; an' it were a foine soight to see him cut.

"They do saay, though, arter I left that part," said he, "to settle in this here quarter, sir, as a new parson as come were 'cute enough to put a man i' his gownd, to taake the crabbin' for him, while he cut roun' through the bushes—it be ood all roun' it, sir; lies in a hole, as I said, sir—an' got to the church thata waay; an' that though they all know'd the fellar, they ood purtend not to, an' say, 'A butiful sarmunt that were o' Sunday, parson,' or 'A powerful discoorse you gin us, your rev'rence,' or summit o' that sort, sir, to tan him loike, an' rile him; hittin' him hard, you see, sir, all the toime.

"Ah, them was merry days, them was, sir! I were a butty-collier then, sir," said Todd; "an' I had my dawg, as good a bull-pup as iver were sin, sir, as you could swing roun' by his tayl or his lip, an' he'd niver say oh! He were a beauty, sir; and I baited wi' him i' the bull ring twice, sir; so you may judge he warn't a baad un."

"How long shall you be, Johnson?" said Archer impatiently.

"Just finishing, old fellow. He will wind up directly."

"He seems good for an hour, the wretch!" muttered Archer.

But Todd was slightly deaf, and persevering. "Ay, sir," he went on, "they did awaay wi' it at last, though more's the pity. An' I had my pigeons, sir, as I flew agin the best theer; an' a couple o' cocks, as I fought ooth the spurs on. Them were noble fellars, them were; but they stopped that too i' the ind; an' now," said Todd, "ony the gentry be allowed to foight 'em; an' then ony perwided they has 'em in theer drorin'-rooms, an' on a Sunday, proivate loike, so as not to be a-encouragin' on it among the payple.

"So, you see, sir," said he, "they be a-taakin' all our innercint amoosements from us; an' we got nothin' now

but our drink an' our fisties, an' the chance o' gettin' took on at the 'lections, to help the foightin' men. But them don't come often, sir; so if it werena for a bit o' gaame-presarvin' we should have but a dull toime o' it, I'se a-thinkin'."

"Game-preserving?" said Archer. "What, taken on as keepers?"

"Well, we reckuns to keep, sir, what we does git," said Todd. "It be thisa waay, you see, sir," said he. "If, when we be about the roads, an' a-bowlin' stones for pastime, a oud cock-pheasant or a bird, sir, hits his head agin one, through him a-lookin' about him a-idlin' loike, we presarves him, you see, sir, in case he's a owner; an' if when ween kep him a bit he seems loikely to goo bad, we puts him i' the pot and ates him; 'ecos it ood be wrong on us, on any on us, sir, to be a-waastin' o' good food. No petickler harm i' that, I suppose, sir?" said Todd.

"I should think," said Archer, "there is harm, and a great deal of harm too, as they are not your property; but if you get caught at it, you will be able to judge for yourself, as I have no doubt a magistrate would give you ample time for reflection."

"They hanna cotched me it," grinned the fellow. "By gom, sir," said he, walking off, "here be mayster."

"What a vagabond it is!" said Johnson, as the fellow turned into the stable.

"Yes," said Archer; "it is a good thing that the old easy-going days, and that lax church-going, that half-and-half observance of the Sunday, have disappeared; but luckily there are not many like him round here, Johnson. Bred amongst the pits, he retains the brutal instincts of the pit people. A bit of poaching is about the worst our own country people are guilty of, and of that it seems quite hopeless to try to cure them. Have you finished?" said he, as Johnson closed the block.

"Yes, quite, John," said Johnson; "so now if the landlord is come, the sooner you see him the sooner shall we be home again. I will walk quietly on, if you won't be long."

"Very well," said Archer; "ten minutes will suffice for my business; so I will go round to the bar and overtake you."

"All right," said Johnson.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARSTON HILLS, AND THE RIDE TO THE LIDDIATS.

"WELL, then, I suppose we must leave you ladies to take care of yourselves," said Andrews, as the horses were brought round to the door, for him and George Oliver to ride to the Liddiats. "You know Cissy of old, Miss Oliver, and what a madcap she is; so don't let her gallop you all over the country, or she will get you into difficulties," said he; "you and the pony."

"Now, Ted, be quiet," said his sister. "We are quite able to see to ourselves; are we not, Louie?"

"I should think so," said she, "and our ponies too. Don't you think so, George?"

"I won't commit myself to any rash assertion," said Oliver; "but I fancy both ponies will suffer before we come back again."

"There, go along with you," said his sister, kissing him; "and mind and be back by tea-time, remember, the evening after to-morrow; and don't you be rash and get down, George."

"Nor you, Teddy," said Cissy; "or lose yourself in the woods; because you do that sort of thing occasionally, you know."

"Spare his feelings, Miss Andrews," said George. "I will see that he is properly labelled before he starts, and he shall be returned to you uninjured."

"Then, on that condition," said Cissy, "I will be comforted. Come here, Ted," said she, "and be started decently. You take no pride whatever in yourself. There, then," said she, as she arranged his handkerchief to her satisfaction; "now you are presentable."

"Mr. Fox, Mr. Andrews; Mr. Andrews, Mr. Fox," said Ted. "Come along, George; the animals are impatient."

"Do you know what you have forgotten?" said his sister, calling to him as he mounted. "You never kissed me!"

"Now, really, did I not?" said Ted. "Now, that is sad! There is nothing hurts a woman's feelings so much, George, as not kissing her when she thinks you are going

to ; or not being," said he, "sufficiently affectionate when you have the chance of it. Can you reach?" said Ted.

"I will try to," said Cissy.

"Then come here," said he.

"Now, Ted," said she, making ineffectual attempts to kiss him, as he edged to the mounting-block, and she stood on it, "why don't you stoop? You are keeping George waiting."

"Tiptoe," said Ted; "I can't break my back. There, will that do?" said he, as she did so.

"If you have not another, it must."

"There, then," said he, as he complied; "now, be off with you." And the two merry girls scampered on to open the gate for them; one of the riders being very glad they were on the road, as he at least was unable to view with calmness even the privileges of a brother; which, considering all things, was not to be wondered at.

Then Andrews and Oliver, shaking hands again with their sisters as they passed through it, cantered over the meadows, and were soon splashing along the watery lane on their way from Coney Green.

And with sundry gossipings with the old women up in the gardens, who always came out when there was a splash heard, they threaded the brook, and were soon in sight of the flag at the Court House; and riding by the red-brick house and the ivied house, they turned opposite the steep bank, and passing by the church, left Honeybrook behind them. And as the high elms, that were just greenening, showed the gray tower and the old yews through them, and the rooks in the rookery were clamouring about their nests, a bright gleam from the evening sun passed across the meadows, and caught with its radiance the big pool and the river.

Cantering on through the copses and the fields, they reached the dingles and rode on by the brook-side; as they had decided, as it was such a fine evening, they would go over the Marston Hills, instead of by the road, as the view from there was almost unequalled even in that part of the country.

"Rattler is fresh this evening," said Andrews.

"Old beans and breed, with an inkling of the morrow," said Oliver. "He will show them the way, if we find, Ted. Was that Parkes we passed?" said he.

"I think it was," said Andrews, "by the build of his back. He is often up here."

"Fly?" said George.

"Both," said Ted; "just as it suits him, or the weather is. But he is oftener at the river, and in the season he sometimes hooks a salmon. He caught a sixteen-pounder once," said he. "They often get as high as Burford Bridge; and one I heard of weighed, George, twenty-four. We have lots of people up here in the season, who, if they don't have sport, they get fresh air; for when the fish won't bite, they climb the hills, to see the views there."

"The finest out of Wales," said George; "that's certain, Ted. Where else will they get such a sweep of country as that we are coming too—from Marston Hills? If those in town knew half the charms there are all up our valley, they would not, I think, so rush off in summer."

"Oh, bless you, they would all go just the same," Ted said. "Too much within their reach, George—too close to home—to be the fashion for such folks to see them. Give me," said Ted, "some decent roadside inn, that's cosy, clean, and comfortable, just for head-quarters for the sleep department; and then a radius of ten miles or so of country such as ours, to do one's eight, ten, twelve, or so of miles per day, or five or six, as different sights might offer. And when you have seen the district, squat again, by pushing on to some fresh dwelling-place. If you should fish, then, George, that's all the better: fresh trout for breakfast, cooked as soon as caught, are not bad things; especially with all those good surroundings of heath and hill, and rock and wood and stream. Oh, George," said Ted, "it's jolly! Let those who like catch trains and do hotels, and spoil their pleasure by the rush of it. Give me the country, at least in the summer."

"Their tempers also, by the cost," said George. "I am with you on that point, Ted, every inch. Suppose we have an out together, Ted, some time in summer, or else in the autumn? We might, I think, get off for a month or so."

"We will see," said Andrews.

"The glorious breeze one gets upon our hills," said George, "beats, though, to my mind, all your Brighton beaches."

"Barring the briny sniff," said Andrews; "we don't get that, that I must own."

"You get what is far better, though, than that, than all," George said—"pure bracing air, that is full of health and strength. None of your smoke and smells, and 'How's the wind?' before you know if you can venture out. With miles and miles of open country round you, and I don't know how high above the sea, it would be odd, Ted, were it otherwise. Black smoke we leave to towns; we do not know it.

"Pure air," said George, "in mouthfuls, air always pure, is what we get; and as for sniffs, my boy, wait till the wild-thyme blows, and beans are out, and wafts from hayfields come against your cheeks, flush on a summer day.

"Look what you have," said he; "in place of waves and shingle, with black spots—bathers—bobbing up and down, and a line of cliffs and many lines of houses, with scarcely a bit of green to rest your eyes, you get great breadths of bold and wooded country, with greens in masses, whose colour varies as you lie and watch it. A white-waved river, winding as it goes, through cultured land, and tracts of meadow-grass, stealing our country odours on its way. Hills sweeping to great heights," said he; "then rounding over, down to another valley just as fine. A mountain-range for distance, and a sky-line broken and varied; and afar, deep blue. No; give me country, Ted."

"In summer, George, I grant you," he replied; "for Honeybrook is so good, and all about it; but in winter it is different. The brook flower-bordered, and the same when frozen, have not like charms. Beautiful in summer, but when, as in the winter, I have to ford it, and most days, George, breaking the ice as I ride through it, it really is not, I think, quite so pleasant. Still," said Andrews, "I would not leave it, George."

"Ay, spring and summer," George said, "and autumn too and winter, for I can do with them; each has its beauties, and I love them all. I am something like John Archer; the very quiet of the country to me is charming—now, don't you think so?"

"Ah, you have lots to do," said Ted, "and always busy; that makes a difference."

"No; I should be just the same," said George, "had I far less. I like the country. Our smoke is thin, and blue,

and shows the trees through, as it steals up through the orchards, and over the banks to the big woods; and takes the fragrance of the blossom with it, that blends with the scent of the pines, or gets lost on the hills in the heath. I love the country."

"Well, so do I," said Ted; "but a little town life now and then is pleasant, especially in winter."

"Who," said George, "will be there, do you think, to-night, at Freeman's?"

"I really do not know," Ted said. "Frank merely said, if I would join some friends for a couple of nights there, and bring you with me, he would find us stable-room, and do us well. So as it would place us nearer to the fixture, I said we would."

"I am glad we are going," said Oliver. "I don't know much about that quarter there. What is your style of fences up that way? You know them?" said he.

"Yes," said Andrews. "Frank Freeman and I are old friends; so we see something of each other. Oh, stiffish. Ox-rails and double grips, and ins-and-outs; so take care how you come. You will be sure to get them."

"All right, Ted," George said. "A pull for the first, a swing for the second, and a twist for the third; but if you have a rusher, fly the lot. Remember that, Ted, or else you will come to grief."

"Plain fences suit me best," said Andrews; "a quiet pleacher."

"A sort of fence that is always deceptive. A good pleached hedge will purl you like a wall; turn you right over," said Oliver, "unless you slant it. Jumped as the twigs lie, it is a brushy fence; but taken straight," said he, "you must be sure to clear it. I have seen some rattling falls, Ted, from low pleached stuff, that a horse jumps lazily, as it looks nothing. Much water?"

"Yes," was the reply; "that is, brooks, but they are wide ones; and there also are some stiff bullfinches. Out there, too, often timber-sticks and harrows are left," said he, "beneath the hedges, stupidly. That makes it awkward."

"It does," said George; "and therefore, as a rule, I swing my fences—safest no doubt, Ted, for you never know what there is on the drop side. Bullfinches I always go through like a bird," said he, "with guard for eyes."

Don't, by the bye, if ever you should have one, jump where the fence in the next field joins it—those bits are cornered—for if you do, you have it, bang against the timber. A friend of mine came down an awful rattler through corner work. He dropped,” said Oliver, “against the rails, and he and horse turned over; and they lay there. It was many months before he rode again.”

“I don't think I should like them,” Ted remarked.

“No, I don't think you would,” was the reply. “Until you are sure about your hands and seat, and nerve—mind that, Ted, nerve—content yourself with either following suit, or taking only what you can look over. To take your own line, and to keep it straight, through a quick thing, with country new to you, requires, if stiffly fenced, a seasoned hand; though those don't always miss the little bits. I got let in myself,” said George, “the other day.

“I went to Harford. We had,” said he, “a quick thing there of five-and-fifty minutes, and there were but three up. The rest were nowhere, as most were scattered in the drips and ditches, or catching horses, far enough from hounds. Well, when hounds were running as fast as racehorses, and every man sent side-eyes at his neighbour, we had a bullfincher so high and thick, that where each went through it closed again completely. My mare slipped up a bit,” said he, “and barely did it; and, hanging, pounded me; for on the drop side was a line of rails, all down the hedgerow to the very bottom. We dropped within it, and could not get out—caged, most completely. So as the fun was getting rather furious, and those who came through had to come like arrows—the hedge was that strong that it hurled some back—I left the saddle, and screwed in the hedge, under a widish tree there, and pulled the mare close up to me,” said he.

“I was not sorry,” George said, “when it all was over; for while it lasted it was a Balaclava, and with lots of shavers, too close to be pleasant. I got some company, though, for five were down against or over that confounded rail-trap—one broken ribs, and one a damaged shoulder—so I got help. We lost the hounds, of course,” said he, “for there we were, and safe; until by working long enough we got a post out, and dropped a rail or two, and so stepped out. The damaged ones we saw to, and went on,

but hounds were gone; and so our day's work was ended."

"That was Druce and Williams, was it not?" said Ted. "I heard of it."

"Yes," said Oliver; "we bound up Williams till he could get a doctor—mere broken ribs—he will soon be right again; but Druce," said he, "we righted them—at least I did."

"You, George?" said Ted.

"Yes," he replied; "he told me how to do it. I saw him go up to a gate," said he, "and put his arm over it, and as I thought, as he had hold of one of the bars, that he was mistaking it for 'a heaver,' and trying to lift it, to get through into the field, I sang out to him," said George, "'Druce, that's a gate! Don't you see the lock on it? Lift at the hinge-post, man, if you want to open it.'"

"'All right,' said he; 'come here a bit.' So I went.

"'Have some sherry, old man,' said I, taking out my flask; 'you are rather whitish. What is it?' 'Only the shoulder, George,' said he. 'I have had it out before, and got it in then myself, just as you see, by hanging to a gate; but as you are here, you may as well help a fellow. Just hold our horses, Alfred, while we squat,' said he to Parsons; he got off right," said George, "the same as I did; so Parsons took them; and down Druce slid upon the turf at once, with his shoulder close against the bottom bar. 'Now grass yourself,' said he, 'and kick your boot off, and drive your toe close up into my armpit. Yes, that is it,' he said, as I soon did it. 'Now, while you keep it there,' Druce said, 'and mind you press well, get a good grip, George, of my arm and pull, till I cry "Hold;" when bring the elbow to my side, and quickly.' I did so," said George, "and then in five minutes, Ted, the bone was in. So then I got my handkerchief, and made a sling, and put him right, and helped him on his horse; and we all went on together; a merry lot of us, I can assure you."

"How did the horses come off?" said Andrews.

"Oh, all right, luckily," said Oliver; "two or three of them barked a bit, but nothing more. If they had been hurt, it would indeed have been awkward. Druce keeps to the sling, but is right again. So, as I was saying," continued Oliver, "it is safest to go with a rush, as you will

more often come to grief if you don't put the steam on than if you do ; so fling it," said he.

"And over-jump, perhaps," said Ted, "into a pit or quarry-hole."

"Well, that you chance," said Oliver. "Of course, I have known it happen ; but oh," said he, "they all get out, bless you, some time or other, or they wait there patiently till somebody comes by."

"Not very pleasant, if there is no one about," said Ted.

"Well, that depends," said Oliver. "If they have 'weeds' left, they can meditate on the uncertainty of things equestrian ; or hatch material for a book that would suit you—say 'Ready Wrinkles for all Wretched Riders ;' and if they are without, console themselves that without risk there is not any glory. Well, never mind, Ted, old fellow, there are worse than you," said George ; "I think you mend."

"I think I do," said Andrews ; "though you don't believe it, George."

"Now, here we are at last at Marston Hills," said Oliver, as they turned to ride up a steep holloway, that was washed into ruts by the rains ; and that was cut through the surface of the sandstone rock, which cropped out there, as it did also in places along the copse, that sheltered the steep hill-side, and those who were on it. "Talk of your views, my boy," said he, "you will see one in a minute ?" And George was right.

Seen in the day-time, it was a glorious contrast to that dark holloway where they were riding. One moment deepest shade, from arching boughs ; the next, all light and air, and height and depth and space ; compelling wonderment, inducing silence—the wish to be alone, and take your fill of that which, soon as seen, but set you thinking—thinking and wondering about the Hand that shaped it. But in the twilight, that same sense was deepened, and merged into a feeling almost awe—so vast, so weird, and so very beautiful was all that one looked on from that high hill ; when evening merged one form into another, and gauzy mists and shadows softened all.

And on the hills the turf was green beneath them, and the bracken brushed against them as they rode by dropping paths, that led into a deep wood of olden growth ; for

almost all the trees were gray with age, and all the undergrowth there high and tangled; flecking soft shadows on the golden lights, that glinted through the trees and touched the rabbits.

Then, as they went on, by many a twist and turn, down through the wood, the ferns that in the damp hollows grew high there rustled as they rode through them; and winding through the scattered trees at the end of them, they came out upon a common—wild, uneven, and open—that, also sloping, led them to the valley, through lanes and copse, and one well-watered dingle; till, two miles down or more, they reached the sward.

And they rode through the valley, dotted with its farmhouses and clustered cottages, and with its ricks and its barns, until they reached the church; where in the evening light, and against the yellow of the sky—that toned the walls, and made paler the reds of the outbuildings—the old gray tower looked blackened. And riding on by the five great yews, that are so gaunt and spectral, and that shade the tombs, about which there are legends, they reached the bridge, and went on up the banks to gain the wooded heights that rose above them; where stood the Liddiats, halfway up, and moated; a place of note, that in olden times, when people held their own, was armed.

Making their way up through the woods as the shades deepened, they pushed through the tall grasses in the thick spinnies, and through the ferns and the gorse in “the rough;” and so on by the sheep in the high pasture lands. Then clinking through the white gates in the orchards, they dipped under the apple-trees, and there met with Carlo; who, barking a loud welcome, led them beneath the poplars to the house; over the filled-up moat and through the archway, where, from the strong high wall, the draw-bridge used to drop. And there did their journey end—the Liddiats—an old and ivied, crumbling, graystone place, where they were welcomed, as twinkling lights began to dot the valley, and owls were heard down in the woods below.

Then, out from the base of that long lofty range, as the sun dipped, a ragged shadow crept—outlined by the woods above—and crossed the valley; and moving onwards, slowly swept the hills, until the last gleam there was overtaken; when the sky paled, and changed to primrose, then

to green and gray; and the valley purpled, and the hills dusked over; and as the young moon showed above the trees, the sky got clear.

Rooks settled, and mists rose; and the stars came out, to watch from their blue home a world in gray—asleep and silent!

CHAPTER XXVII.

ROSE BRANDON OF HAZELWOOD.

BRANDON of Hazelwood was a tenant of Archer's, and he lived at the Little Copse Farm, near the village. He and his wife were a hard-working couple and worthy people, and of their family of six, three were dead, the son was at school, and the daughters, Rose and Nellie, were at home: the one, a pretty girl of eighteen; the other, a young darling of three, and the pet of the village.

Rose, as we have seen, was a nice girl, and a very good girl too, and a great help to her mother, who was often ailing, for she could put her hand to anything; and no matter how busy she had to be, or how much she had to see to, it was all the same to her; and wherever she was, there was sure to be good-humour about; and she was a capital girl amongst the poultry, and a dab hand at butter-making.

And as Rose was a nice bright-looking girl, with a sweet innocent face—"a Greuze-like face," as Johnson had remarked—she had not wanted for admirers, young as she was; but the favoured one, and the one who was now engaged to her, was Harry Harrison, the son of a small farmer in the neighbourhood; who was only waiting until he could meet with a little farm, to make Rose his wife. Every place, however, that was to be let was at once taken, by the offer of an advance of rent from some one or other; so scarce were smaller farms, and so many were there after them—at least if they were anything like well-fruited.

But as the old people—his parents and hers—wished him to settle near them, and there was no time overpast—for Harrison was but two-and-twenty—the time went pretty pleasantly with them; as, living at Aynsley—a village six miles distant from the Hall, and so eight from

Hazelwood—he managed to ride over frequently; and as a rule, his Sundays were spent with her.

Still, were anything to offer—any little fruity place, where he could keep a few cows and some poultry, and that had a bit of land to it—he thought, as their wants were but few, they might make a start there, at all events; as the old people had saved up a hundred pounds for Rose, and he had four hundred of his own, that an uncle left him, and they were both of them, he and Rose, prudent and careful.

Rose was an especial friend of Archer's, who, retaining two rooms for himself at the farm, stayed there for some time in the hunting season, and frequently for a week at a time in the summer; so, as he said, he really seemed "like one of the family;" as they were all quite at home with him, and saw to his wants without fussing him; and, let him wander about as he pleased, they never hindered their work for him.

He therefore liked the place, and it did him good to be there; for in the summer especially it was wonderful what an early riser he would become. But, then, Rose was a nice girl, and feeding the fowls belonged to her; and he was partial to fowls—so he said, at least when he was there—and hence it was but natural that he should like to help her; and that fetched him out of it, for they were as early people at the Copse Farm as any in Hazelwood.

So, after he had had a potter in the cow-house, and seen the girl there fill the pails—who had always quite enough to say for herself—and been amongst the horses in the stables, and round the garden-orchard, with Bran, their doggie, on the hunt for field-mice, he would come round to meet Rose and feed the fowls; and then go with her to the little dairy, where, under her care, everything was spotless.

Johnson spied her once there—when he was over with Archer—as she was busy butter-making, and he got very wild about it; for she was in a print dress, lilac-spotted, and a ray of sunlight that came in through the little grating—that was overhead, and showed the blue sky through it, and a trail of ivy also that came creeping in there—fell upon her hair, and made a warm patch on the quarries beyond her.

"Such tints and form," said he, "from all those dairy things; and such a background; such nice cool colour for

those pots and pans! Those milk-leads will," said he, "give breadth of colour, a neutral ground for all those pans and bowls, whose tones are good; primrose and stone-tint, purple-red and black, pure white, and cream, and some of them dove-gray. It ought to come well.

"Beneath the slabs too, there are umbers and blue-blacks; those cans are silvery, those pails ash-brown; with broad softened shadows lying all about there, on crimson quarries, close to rich colour mellowed in the sun—a patch of it—from that ray that slanted downwards through the window, and caught that bit of harmonising green—that trail of ivy. A first-rate bit of colour, John," said Johnson; "kept in its place by that light pretty dress Miss Rose had on."

"And by the primrose pats," said Archer; "that told against the lilac that was in it."

"Just so," said Johnson. "I will make a picture of it."

And he did so, then.

And from the dairy, Archer would take a turn through the daisied paddock to the little lawn in the front, which Rose made so pretty with the flowers that Kate and Florence gave her, as she was a favourite with each of them; and there he would stand a bit and listen to the birds in the bushes, and watch the mist as it rose, smoke-like, from the meadows, and floated across to the woods, over the soft blue haze of early morning.

Then by the beds and the walks into the shrubbery, to look for birds'-nests in the honeysuckles, with often Dick the cat for company; and through the kitchen-garden to the gardener, working amidst the healthy smell of mould, or at his early meal, with Bran beside him.

"And so," as Pepys would say, "to breakfast; for vigorous onslaught on good things provided. New milk and fresh-laid eggs and nice thick cream, and juicy home-cured hams and hissing rashers, and cut-and-come-again sirloins or ribs—good farmhouse fare."

"Our trouble is very great—Miss Rose and I," said he to Johnson, "with those confounded fowls. I wish that Cochin fellow was stewed up; for he has no manners, not a bit of it. You may scuff and scout him; but he does not care. He will hold his own, and elbow all about him. I like the pigeons best," said Archer; "they are so pretty,

and coo so lovingly, and seem so happy. We have lots of chicks, and also little ducks; young beauties, but such stuffers—waiting peas.”

“Now don’t,” said Johnson; “for you touch me there.”

“You must see them all, old man: the colts, calves, lambs, and little pigs, and gulls—a lot of them,” said Archer. “A pity, is it not, that they must grow, and yield their charm to stern necessity? But you like seasoning, and I like mint-sauce; and as for crackling, why, pray don’t name it!”

“Another tender point,” said Johnson; “so touch it lightly.”

“I think young things are all so very nice,” said Archer, “one feels inclined to pet them, every one, seen in their own surroundings, as seen here. Do you know, Johnson, almost all will come to call, and let me feed them. Dumb things soon take to those who treat them kindly; and in their own dumb way,” said he, “will show they know it. None but a brute would ever hurt or munch them. Here in the country there is little of it, they so grow up together; but I think in the towns it is most awful.”

“It is,” said Johnson. “If I lived there,” said he, “I would make my face soon known amongst the carters.”

“And so would I,” said Archer; “and so ought every man, till he can stop it. Few would believe what horses have to suffer from innate cruelty and demon temper. The horses here are all well used,” said Archer; “the men know me, and know I look them over every morning. I am up, as you are aware, Johnson, pretty early. I like to sniff about amongst the flowers while they are wet and sparkling in the sun, and all around is cool, and calm and quiet; and listen to the singing of the birds, and watch them darting out from tree to tree, the happy fellows, just as tame as pets—none hurt them here. You know my bedroom? Up amongst the roses that cluster round and run along the sill, and by-and-by will be one mass of bloom, some birds are building—piefinches. They did so last year, just below the window; that while I dressed, I looked into the nest; five little yellow beaks; ’twas very jolly. I am fond of birds,” said he; “in fact, of all dumb things.”

"And so am I," said Johnson.

And now that Archer was again at Hazelwood, for his usual stay there until the end of the hunting season, he became aware of the engagement of Rose to Harrison; for one day when chatting to her mother, she told him of it; and also that as soon as Mr. Harrison could meet with a small farm in the neighbourhood, they hoped to get married.

Now it so happened that at this time Archer had a tenant at a little place of his—midway between Grantley and Hazelwood—from whom he had great difficulty in getting his rent; and as the man, Paget, had got into drinking habits, he wanted to get rid of him, as the farm at his hands was being neglected. So, turning one thing and another over in his mind, and wishing to do Rose a good turn if he could, he rode to the Quarry Farm at the ford; saw Paget, and made him this offer: that if he would turn out in two months from that day—say by May-day—he would forego the year's rent, and so let him take the stock with him. So, of course, the man closed at once, thankful of the chance.

Then John Archer had a chat with Kate, his sister; and the result of it was, that Mrs. Brandon was asked to make certain statements to Mr. Harrison—but not to tell Rose till he told her to do so—and to sound him about them, whether they would or would not suit his views. So she did so; and Harrison himself had now come over to see Archer about it.

"Rose," said Archer, opening the window, as she was busy with her flowers, "can you come in for a moment? We have no secrets from you."

So she came.

"I was just telling Mr. Harrison, Rose," said he, "that I want to be at a wedding the early part of May, about the first or second week; and if you think you shall both be at liberty then, I should like you to be there also. It might be of use, you know, to learn your lesson."

"I fear, though," said Rose, "by the time poor Harry here has met with a farm, it would all be forgotten. We shall have to wait a long while yet, Mr. Archer."

"But you would like to get married soon, if you could?" said he.

"If Harry liked to, I should," said Rose.

"Well, he wants to have a bit of talk with you," said Archer; "so I will leave you together, Rose, while I go to the stables."

So then Rose was told of Archer's offer of the farm, "rent free for the first year," if he would just see to things for him during the few months he should be out of England, "and at a low rent afterwards;" and to enter on it at or before May-day, as would best suit himself, as Paget could turn out earlier if required.

When Archer returned, Rose was sobbing, from overjoy, and could only hold out her hand to him; so taking it in his own, he said: "Not a word, Rose. I am only too glad to be of service to you. I wish you every happiness, both of you!"

And there were few happier that night than Rose Brandon.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LOVE AND LIBERTY—CHARLIE BURTON AND FLORENCE MILLS.

THE end of the month was at hand; and it was the old Squire's birthday, his sixty-ninth. And the gout, that prevented him joining the meet, and that had increased from his agitation at the escape of Florence, had now left him; so that he felt able, on this twenty-eighth day of March, to look forward to the enjoyment of the occasion, and the company of those who were coming to keep it with him—Mrs. Burton and Charlie. And the roses that had vanished for a few days from the cheeks of Florence had come again, and the agitation she had suffered had passed away; for as she was a girl of buoyant spirits and great pluck, it took a good deal to daunt her.

Charlie had been frequent in his visits, and Mrs. Barrow and the Squire had scarcely known how to make enough of him, so thankful did they both feel that he had saved Florence. The party at Boscabel had passed off pleasantly, his mother had returned, and he had succeeded, at the Squire's request, in meeting with a horse for Florence; and it was arranged between them that he was to come early that morning, and ride him over; his mother coming afterwards in the carriage.

Mrs. Burton was going to stay at the Hall for a day or two, and then Florence was to return with her, to spend a few days at Boscabel; to meet some lady friends she had known in town, and who were coming there on a visit—Miss Smith and Miss Palmer, cousins, and daughters of old friends of Mrs. Burton.

The March winds had ceased; fern-fronds were on the commons, and ferns were in the woods; and the pale greens of the young leaves were clouding over the browns, and spreading across the tree-tops in the plantations. The birds were nesting, and the blackbirds and the thrushes were singing as they built; and the April flowers were forward in the coppices, ready to peep out at the first bidding of the warm sun. The garden beds had their colours—their purples, their gold, and their white—the almond-trees their blush, and the japonicas their scarlet; the bees were at the blossoms, the hares were in the meadows, and the rooks were quieter, and greens were thickening. Spring was at hand.

And as the rays of the morning sun fell upon the high towers at the Hall, making light points upon the ivy, and bringing out the mellow tints upon the sandstone, Florence—in a gray dress, and with her sunny hair under a black-velvet hat and white feather—came from the shrubbery; and crossing the lawn by the round fountain, met Burton, who had just cantered up the avenue, and turned into the drive. He thought he had never seen his cousin look so well, and she did not know when he had looked so handsome—for he was certainly sufficiently good-looking to be called handsome, especially when his face, as it was then, was lit up with animation—for he looked specially saucy and confident on that morning, seeing that he was going to have a whole day with his lady-love. So being at the outset well pleased with each other, the day went well with them.

“Oh, what a nice horse you have, Charlie!” said she, as he got off and shook hands with her. “Why, it is a new one! Well, he is a love, and so like my poor bay! Why, I do think he is just the colour, and the height too—well, he is a beauty! Would he carry me, Charlie? Oh, I should so like a ride on him! Has he ever had a side-saddle on him?”

“I think he has,” said Charlie.

"Would you mind me having mine on him, just to see, you know? Oh, I should like a ride on him, that I should!" said Florence. "May I, Charlie? Oh, do let me! I will get off if he kicks; I won't run a risk now, if you will let me. Now do, Charlie," said she, "there's a dear fellow!"

"But what would your uncle say?" said Burton.

"He need not know," said she.

"But I must go in and see him," said Charlie; "and he might keep me."

"Well, don't then," said Florence.

"But it is his birthday," said Charlie.

"Well, he is busy at the back somewhere," replied Florence; "now don't you go, Charlie. We could so soon get the saddle on between the bushes here," said she, as they moved into the shrubbery, "if you would wait a bit. Now do! I could send Susan for it, and she could bring it, and my skirt. I won't stay for my habit, if you will. Now do, Charlie!"

"What would you give me if I were to?" said Charlie, as they passed into the thick of it, with his arm round her.

"There is nobody looking, is there?" said Florence.

"Not a soul!" said Charlie.

So the compact being sealed, and another seal impressed as he drew her to him—to make it "binding"—she flitted round to her morning-room and tapped at the window; and Susan, who was there "putting things to rights," soon after appeared in the shrubbery, her head beneath a side-saddle, and her shoulders draped with a riding-skirt.

"Shall I turn my back?" said Charlie, wishing to observe propriety.

"Perhaps you had better," said Florence.

"Say when, then," said Charlie; "and I will change the saddles, and look at the laurels till I hear you."

So in a few minutes, all being ready, and his own saddle and a half-crown placed in the hands of Susan, who wished there were more such nice young gentlemen, Charlie helped Florence into the saddle, and passed out through the wicket; and so under the sunk fence into the park, that her uncle should not see them.

"He walks well," said Florence, as they went along, "and he has a nice mouth too."

"Yes," said Charlie; "and so has somebody that I know."

"Why, Charlie," said she, "how can you! You are quite saucy this morning."

"Yes," he said; "but it is you who make me so."

"How?" said Florence.

"By looking so lovable," said Charlie.

"Oh, if you are going in for compliments, I shall be off," said she; and touching the bay with her heel, she cantered him to the oaks; and then turning him round, trotted back again; the horse going well, as he was of course thoroughly broken for a lady's use. "Charlie, he is a dear horse! He moves beautifully," said Florence, as she reined up. "May I jump him? Just one little one, you know?"

"What do you call little?" said he.

"Why, the fence at the top," said Florence.

"Which is nearer five feet than four," said he, "when you are at it; and with a drop too."

"But I can do it," said she.

"I dare say you can," said Charlie; "but it won't do, Florry; your uncle would be angry."

"Well, then, the brook," urged Florence; "just over and back again?"

"You won't tumble into it if I let you?" said Charlie.

"Trust me," said she; and riding off, she went down to the brook, and went over it, and then jumped it back again; but instead of returning, she continued to zigzag up it till she had jumped it a dozen times; when, making a circuit on the canter, she sent the horse over it again with a bound, and came up the bank at a hand-gallop.

"That is 'trust me,' is it, you young madcap?" said Charlie, as she dropped the reins on the horse's neck, and, half out of breath, did her hair up.

"But, you know, Charlie, we did not say how many times I was to jump it. There," said she, as her curls were in place again, "now I am ready for another. Oh, how I do wish I had such a beauty! You are a perfect dear," said Florence, patting the bay as she spoke, "a positive love!"

"Am I?" said Charlie. "I hope you will always think so."

"Now, Charlie, you know I did not mean you," said Florence.

"Very pretty, very pretty indeed!" said a well-known voice, as they passed round the sunk fence for the stables. "And pray whose horse are you on, you young pickle?" said her uncle, who had met Susan with the saddle, to her utter confusion.

"Oh, uncle," said Florence, putting up her hands to her face, "I did not know you were there; but he is such a beauty, I could not help it, I could not indeed;" and jumping off, she ran round to the lawn to appease him. "Oh, I wish I had such a love! I should prize him," said Florence.

"Should you?" said he. "And what would you give your old uncle if he could buy him for you?"

"But he is Charlie's," said Florence.

"No, Florry, he is yours," said Charlie; "your uncle's present to you."

"And to be called 'Charlie,'" added her uncle, as Florence threw her arms round him and kissed him, and then for very joy began to whimper, that made the old man have a cold in his eyes immediately.

The day so well commenced passed well; and in the evening, when the two cousins strolled into the garden, they prolonged their walk into the wilderness, and there, loving and loved, rested in the arbour.

"And you will always be good to me?" said Florence as they sat there, as she raised her blue eyes to his, and her curls touched his cheek from the closeness of it.

"Always, my darling," said he, as her waist felt his pressure.

"And never cross me?"

"Never!"

"Not if I am wilful?"

"Not if you are wilful—ever so wilful, you dear girl!"

"But if I were very naughty, Charlie, and began to pout, you know?" pursued Florence, trying with coquettish perverseness to depreciate herself in his eyes, knowing how very safe it was for her to do so.

"What is a good thing to take creases out, Florry?" said Charlie, not seeming to heed her remark.

"Creases! How funny, Charlie! Why, pressure—warmth and pressure, of course. Whatever made you ask that?" said she.

"To know if pouting would matter, my darling," was the reply; "but from what you say, it won't."

"Why? I don't understand you," said she.

"Well, pout then, you little beauty, and I will show you," said Charlie. "We will soon have the creases out."

"Oh, Charlie, now you know I did not mean that. How naughty you are!" said she.

"Yes, I know I am," said he. "Well, look here, Florry; give me a kiss and forgive me."

"You won't ask for two, if I do?" said she, looking particularly roguish.

"It is never safe to promise," said he; "but I won't if I can help it;" and the request was complied with.

"Stop a bit, Florry," said he, as she took her lips away; "that was not fair, you know; that was only half one."

"Well, there then, you naughty one;" and the kiss was repeated,

"Ay, that was better," he said, "but it was not a good one."

"Charlie, you are incorrigible!" said she. "Well, there then, you naughty fellow;" and she kissed him a third time. "Now, you are not to ask for another, remember, all the evening."

"Let me see," said he, as he looked at his watch, "what time is it now? All right, Florry, 5.40 now, sun sets at six; evening over, and night commences. A twenty minutes' wait. But now, I say, Florry, don't be hard upon a fellow. Would it not be better—in case, you know, anything happened; any one came, you know—to say, as the playbills have it, 'twenty minutes are supposed to have elapsed,' and go in for the thing at once? You know how one hankers after what one's fond of."

"I ought not to have given you one at all," said she; "only I did not like to refuse you, as——"

"Yes, Florry," said Charlie, "as what?"

"As—as we are cousins, Charlie; but it was very wrong indeed of me to do it."

"Was it, darling?" said Charlie. "What, when we are engaged?"

"Now, Charlie," she replied, "I have not said I 'will' have you."

"No, but you were going to," said he; "only, you

see, you cannot talk and kiss at the same time. Can you, now?"

"You are very naughty, very naughty indeed!" said Florence; "and I have a great mind——"

"Now, Florry, don't you get on too fast," said he; "or you will be out of breath, and miss a word."

"Yes; but if you are to have all my kisses before marriage, how am I to have any for you afterwards?" said Florence, trying to look as puzzled as possible.

"No time like the present," was the reply; "we will leave the future to take care of itself. Besides, my darling, if such a dreadful state of things should ever come about, that you had really no more to part with, I could soon right that," said Charlie.

"Could you? How, Charlie?" asked Florence; being, no doubt, eager for information.

"By giving them all back to you," he said; "so that you would be able to commence afresh immediately."

"Now, you are naughty indeed!" said she, tapping his cheek with the primroses he had picked for her, and looking up at him with laughing eyes.

"You young gipsy!" said he, clipping her close to him, as he caught the glance of them, and kissing her with a smack that told of the warmth of it.

"Now, Charlie, don't. You must not," said she, making a feeble effort to free herself. "You will stop my breath if you—kiss me so!—you—will—really! Now, do leave off!—do—Charlie—do you hear? I know the gardener's about. You will—now, Charlie!—have him see us. I know you will."

"Oh, bother the gardener!" said Charlie, ceasing his occupation for a moment.

"No, but really, Charlie," said Florence, "you are rude now—Charlie!—now, you should not when I ask you not to. Now don't, there's a dear fellow. I ought, I am sure, to be quite offended with you!"

"If you ought, you won't, will you?" said he, kissing her again, till her neck and her cheeks blushed alike. "Well, now, look here, Florry," said he, settling down a bit, "I am going to be very good—I am indeed! What were we talking about? Oh, I know," said he. "Well, you will have me, won't you? I am a queer sort of a fellow, I know; but I say, Florry, you know I love you,

don't you, now? And I will always be good and kind to you; I will indeed! And you shall always have your own way; you shall, really!

"Now, Florry; I say, Florry," pursued Charlie, his arm still round her, "now just look up at a fellow, do look up. You will have me, won't you? Say yes, now; you will say yes, I know. Now, do say yes. Come, Florry, I will be so good to you, and always love you so much!"

"Quite sure?" said the wilful one.

"Quite sure," said Charlie, as the white feather tipped, and he caught the sparkle of her blue eyes under it.

"Then I will have you, my dear Charlie," she said; "for I do love you very much."

And taking his hand in her own, she lifted her lips and she kissed him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BLUE-EYED NELLIE,* THE PET OF THE VILLAGE—TOWN AND COUNTRY.

APRIL had come again—"the primrose month," the month of flowers; that joyous month to every country child. And on the wood-banks, and in all the copses, the genial showers were bringing into bloom the sun-warmed buds, that now, no longer hidden by their leaves, showed by their colours that the spring was come. With snowy blossoms all the thorns were thick, and patched with blue was many a little dell; and blue—from hyacinths—was in the woods, with white anemones and violets; and tufts of primroses were thickly clustered in moss and grass.

Her spring-like robe had Nature thrown on all, and green was everywhere—that joy to wearied eyes and jaded frames; that nature-cure to many a city child—green ferns, green fields, green trees, green hills, green woods, in varied tints as under sun or shade. And flying storms, that made the clovers shake, and shut the sorrels round the old tree-trunks, rippled the mowing-grass like waves on sand. With lilac cuckoo-flowers and cowslip-bells, that bent unto the breeze, each mead was gay, and thick with daisies countless as the stars. Eyebright and cranesbill too showed side by side, beneath the woodbine and wild

white-vine hedges; and groves of orchards, hanging on the slopes, had button-buds for next month's sheet of blossom.

From every copse came joyous trills of song; in every thicket birds were carolling—on high the lark, and in the hedge the linnet; and rooks sailed by with little twigs for nests, busy, like all their brotherhood, in building; poising and soaring as they met the wind, that whisked about the manes of all the horses, that, single-file, were in the hop-yards plodding, "ploughing down" the rows, to help the hops to cluster.

In hazel-coppices the nightingales had just commenced to warble forth their notes, by cowslip meadows where the dew lay long, in answer to their rivals in the poplars, as the pale moon rose up, and silvered clouds—reminders all how swiftly time was flying, and that the hunting season must soon end!

And pretty Rose Brandon, who was now happier than ever, was almost counting the days when she should be a bride, married at last to the one who had so long loved her. But dear little Nellie, her sister, when she heard the old folks talking about it, could not understand it at all; or make out why Rose was going to leave them, or what Mr. Harrison had to do with it. It was a mystery to her, the lot of it; and her repeated inquiries of all those who came to the house failed to make her one whit the wiser; and every bit of fresh finery that she saw about there elicited the remark, "But why?" And Nellie's notes of interrogation were very frequent.

Had it not been long evident to Rose that people liked her, the knowledge of it would have been now forced upon her by the many little attentions shown her from all quarters. The school-children were busy for her, and the cottagers were planning surprises; and there was money changing hands in the village. For the first of May there was to be such a May-day as the village had not known for many years; for that day was to be Rose's wedding-day; and Rose was a favourite.

John Archer too was busy also, as he had his own views on the subject, and was quietly maturing them; and there were frequent conferences with his sister, and frequent visits to the Quarry Farm; for there was a good deal of work going on there, as alterations were in progress.

And the old Squire and Florence, who had gone to Boscabel for a few days to stay with Mrs. Burton and the ladies who were there—Miss Smith and Miss Palmer—and to be “Oh, so happy!” in the company of her “dear Charlie,” were quite as interested as any of them; and Florence herself was busy laying under contribution each one she came across; and there were whispers about too that the wedding-breakfast would “not” be at Hazelwood; for the old Squire, who was very fond of Rose, “would take good care of that.”

So curiosity was on the tiptoe in the village as to what would be “to be sin o’ Maay-daay;” but the general conclusion that was come to was “summut worth lookin’ at, a reckon!” And as Kate Archer wanted to see Rose about several little things, it was arranged that she should come over to the Grange, and bring young Nelly with her, and have a good long day there, and stay the night, the first time her father could spare the pony. John Archer, who had just left Hazelwood a week or two earlier than usual, as he had so much to see to at the farm, offered to drive over for them, and to drive them back again; but as Nellie was to come also, the pony was decided on as the safest under the circumstances.

But we must say a word or two about Nellie—“blue-eyed Nellie, the pet of the village”—a most engaging child, a household fairy, and quite a woman in her little ways, though only four years old the first of May; who lays the law down, chatters by the hour, and holds long conversations with the dog, who answers waggingly, with stump of tail. But horses are her loves. She knows them all, and calls to each by name upon the road, and squeals and screams at every one she sees, and tells you all about them in her way.

The cob’s her “po-nee;” and they are bound to let her have hold of one rein when he is in the shafts, as driving is her forte and greatest pleasure; but she always tries to get them altogether; so, every journey, the cob has to “come up!” Her little arms tire not with all the jerking, for the cob is used to her, so does not pull; and he is also quite a decent little beast, sure-footed, and no shier, and good-tempered; a roan—a beauty—round as any barrel, and who picks his legs up, and has steady pace.

It is this cob, Jerry, that is part of Nellie’s exhibition

when people go there. First, the pictures in the room are pointed out by her, and all the dogs and the horses in them chattered about; next, the dog is captured for a ride, Nellie getting on him astride, with her face to his tail—or, at least, what is left of it—the stump serving her to hold on by, while he trots about with her. Then she has to cuddle him, and to roll about with him, to show what she can do with him; and that over, to her own satisfaction, she takes you out through the kitchen to see “the other dog, Lion,” the one that is chained up outside by the kiln; but she keeps hold of your hand by his kennel, and only talks to him—his disinclination to be pulled about, like Bran, being summed up by her in the information that he is “naughty.”

Then, she still holding you by the hand, you have to go up the steps into the kitchen-garden, where all the things are duly shown to you; after which, having been escorted by her into the arbour at the end of it, she trots you along the top, and out through the wicket into the hop-yard, to tug you along up the hedgerow to show where the hens lay; they also coming under the term “naughty,” for not laying in their nests in the hen-pens. And you have to go down with her to the hen-pens, to see what there is there, and to have all the fowls that are chuckling about there pointed out to you; with special comments on the little bantams Jenny and Joey, with the information that the first-named one laid an egg, “and there was nothing in it!”

From there you are taken to the flower-garden in the front, where Bran is in waiting for another cuddling; and then, having had all the flowers and things duly shown to you, you are led down the steps into the road, to the stables at the end there, where the horses are exhibited by her, and the “po-nee” is shown, her little tongue going “nineteen to the dozen” all the time. You have then to jump her up on to the pony—the real secret of the whole exhibition and her reward—when, having jigged there until she has been her imaginary journey on him, she takes you to the bridge, just to show you where they wash the sheep—in the backwater there, near the mill-wheel—and into the long slingity orchard, to where the watercress is; and then, unless there are any horses about going to be shod, or gipsies with dogs and donkeys, you

may, perhaps, be allowed to conduct her to the house again, with Bran's stump of tail in full wag at the thought that his services may now be once more required.

And if you are at all curious to ascertain the strength of good lungs in a juvenile, or how fast young tongues can chatter, you have only to wait till the harriers come by with Benbow, on their way back from exercise; or till the groom Carter, from the Hall, comes along with the setters and pointers. But if Benbow, who, being a married man without family, is always accustomed to take great notice of her, happens to spy her at the window, he stops the hounds, and waits at the steps till she comes down there, as the hounds, knowing her, are quite quiet with her. His only difficulty, then, is to get them away again; for, long after he has finished his cup of cider, there is always some hound or other left that has not been cuddled, or some favourite hound that has to be cuddled twice over.

Such days are days of talk with Nellie, for her tongue never tires, and her young legs are equally as active. They trip her up at times, though, when she wants to go faster than they can carry her; but she thumps the dust off, and she never grumbles; so that her tumbling about a bit does not much matter, as, if she falls, she goes on again.

And as Rose Brandon drove up to the Grange on the morning that Kate had a letter from her, John Archer was on the lawn looking out for them; and as they made their appearance, Rose had hold of one rein and Nelly the other, pulling the pony's head off with "Come ups!"

"Well, uncle John"—she always called him "uncle"—"I come!" sings out the youngster. "Po-nee he lazy—he stop—up a bank," says Nellie, quite ignoring breathing time, as, having assisted Rose out of the pony carriage, he lifted her out—such a fattie!—and kissed her plump lips as she held his whiskers; and then he perched her on his shoulder to the house, and put her up into the mistletoe, that hung there in the kitchen by the bacon, and made her break a piece off, and kiss him; which she did laughingly, and flogged him with it. Then all going in to Kate, and the wraps removed, he got her on his knee, and brought out one by one some wooden toys; a horse and dog, a goat, and little pony; and last, a picture-book—best gift of all; for Nellie doats on books with pictures in

them, especially if coloured, and po-nees! Down slid the darling off his knees directly, and on the rug she settled for the morning.

Being thus able to get away from her, he left Rose and Kate, and started off, to try to find some primroses for Nellie; and also to see a child upon the road, who had been ill for a long time, but who now was nearly well again. Taking old Bobby with him, he went up the bank—he first admonishing him as to rabbits—but before he was halfway up it he heard Tanner protesting loudly that he was left alone; so singing out to “loose him,” on he came, as wild as possible, and upset Bobby; then Bobby raced him, and soon knocked him over, and chivying round and round, was floored in turn.

So, rating at the rascals, he went on, and at the white gate met old John from Dyneley; who was staying in the village at his son’s for some few days; looking, in clean smock-frock, the picture of good health; his voice just shaky, but his cheeks like apples; and red to the very roots of his white hair.

“Well, John,” said Archer; “what, you are still about? You are a wonder! Why, how old are you, John—I have known you long?”

“Not fur fro’ eighty, sir,” said John, “an’ thank you, sir. An’ forty-four I’s bin along o’ mayster—a longish time, sir—all on one farm too; an’ in same cottage. God bless him for it! I’s groomed his horses now for maany a year, an’ turned him out a-huntin’, as you seen him—thanks be to God I’s had the health to do it; an’ so he lets me potter like about, an’ do ma bit o’ gardin, or come down; but work or plaay, theer be allers dinner for ma.”

“But I should have thought, John, work had been over with you,” said Archer.

“I can’t do much, it’s true, sir, in the stable; but in the saddle-room I sits an’ thinks o’ all the runs as mayster’s teld to ma, one time or t’other; an’ I knows the pads, what fox it were, an’ wheer they run’d him to—ay, all on ’em, sir, as be on the doore. Then I iles the saddle-bars, or does the bits; or I watch the lad a-strappin’ at the horses; and tries to tache him do his best by mayster.” And soon John pulls his forelock and trots on, being all the better for his little gossip—a good man in his day, and a trusty servant.

Whistling Tanner—Bobby having bolted, and left a blackbird for an old black cat, that was always poaching up and down the road—Archer turned in to the Mill Bank with the dog, and down into the bottom to the Red Lane; where he viewed a fox, and Tanner took the brook, after a moor-hen or a water-rat; and at the splashing, Bobby raced down to him, leaving his cat for what he thought was “game.” The rascal lodged the cat, for the Grange groom saw it—up in an apple-tree just by the shop.

Well in the wood at last, with the dogs at heel—through a nut-tree stick that he cut in case they wanted it—as they did, and often—he went along the top ride to the turn, and took the path that led him to the keeper’s. But Gill was out, and there was only Polly in—a rosy girl, his daughter, and sixteen—and she was at the back there feeding fowls; so Archer would not wait, as the dogs were with him; for the keeper’s dogs there, that were tied up, luckily, would not stand nonsense, or being walked round by that varmint Tanner.

Going up to the ride again, and down the bank, through the crushed ferns and the brushwood and the bramble boughs, to where he thought he should perhaps find some primroses—a slope that had the morning sun full on it—he soon came upon a lot of them—several clusters—that were half hidden in the litter from the trees; and picked them all; a bunch for Nellie, and the rest for Jane—the little girl who had been such a cripple, but who now could walk again. She had broken her leg just before Christmas, by tumbling out of an apple-tree at “the picking”—the mistletoe for the markets; so had to be left behind by her mother, and taken care of at the Union—where, getting on her leg too soon, and contrary to orders, she unfortunately broke it a second time. As John Archer, who was one of the guardians for Grantley parish, found the child’s health failing a good deal, and hearing from the doctor that outdoor residence for her was advisable, he had her placed with some tidy people in the parish, and he himself paid what extra was needed for her maintenance.

She was now about again; and he had a sort of vague idea floating in his mind, that as it seemed almost a pity to send her back from green fields and wild flowers to black pit-banks and pit-language, she might possibly, and

for the mere matter of her "keep," be useful to Rose Brandon, as an extra help, in her new home, provided Rose fell in with his own ideas as to the money to be made at the Quarry Farm "by herself;" by placing rooms there which she could well spare—for some time, at all events—at the disposal of the people who, through all the summer months, and the autumn ones too, frequented the fishing-ford; artists, fishermen, and picnic-parties; the woods above it being well known for the beauty of them.

And as Rose was at the Grange, Archer thought that he would go to see the girl; and if she seemed to like the idea of remaining in the country, he would then have a talk with Rose about it; as he and Kate would often—by making parties there, and letting all their friends know about it—be able to be of use to her, as every little would help; and as the daughter of an old tenant, and one they liked very much, they would be glad if they could be of service to her.

So Archer called, gave her the primroses—that made her eyes sparkle again—and had a chat with her. She was a girl with fair features, and with plenty of brown hair, which only wanted the comb well through it, and to be brushed into shape a bit, for her to be very presentable; and she was twelve years old, and strong; and had been in that quarter for three or four seasons with her mother, hop-picking, from Staffordshire—she lived in "the Black Country."

"The nice green fields," said she, "I'm very fond of; and the rosy apples, and the cows they milks; and I likes to get the nuts and blackberries, and eat 'em in the kiln, when work is over. We don't get them at home, there ar'n't no fields; I never see 'em till I come a-pickin'; nor oods, nor anythin' but black pit-banks, great heaps o' cinders; we don't have no hills! We're black enough at home, as goodness knows; but if I lived out here I'd be quite clean; the dirt it shows like where it's all so bright and nice sunshiny; but at home it don't."

"You like our hills, then, and our woods and lanes?" said Archer.

"Oh, that I do, sir; but I dearly love 'em now all the flowers be out, and lambs a-runnin'. I wish," said she, "the pickin' could be made to come now; it would be nice!"

"You have the orchards, though, you know," said Archer.

"Oh yes, the apples; I'd heerd o' them long time, they's Hereford."

"In Herefordshire, you mean—all one to you," said Archer; "but this is Worcestershire; with lots of orchards also, and hops too. When you come with your mother in the autumn, we shall see," said he, "how this poor leg of yours has stood it, toiling up black pit-banks, day after day."

"We play about there, sir, though they be dirty; it's only when we comes here as we don't like 'em. Black bain't a lively colour, be it, sir? It ar'n't like green; or that nice purty blue, that's in the sky, above them great big woods, where me and little Mary went a-nuttin'. Ween only black smoke, never no blue sky; and all the water's yaller-like and brown; not shiny white, or like slate bonnet-linin', as where them red cows used to come to drink, down at the bottom o' them hangin' orchids. We never sees a daisy, nor a bird; only some sparrers, but they're mighty black uns! There were a blackbird too," said she, "now I emember, but he were in a cage, and oodna sing."

"Suppose you lived out here, now, altogether?" said Archer.

"Too good," was her reply, "for likes o' me, sir; a sort o' heaven—leastways, as parson puts it, I should think so."

"And yet," thought he, "how many are there here who, in the midst of all that's beautiful—pure air, fine country, health and homeliness—never think one instant of their favoured lot; or ever contrast it with poor souls in town who hear but of the country, and see, the whole year round, scarce one green field!"

He spoke to Rose, who eagerly adopted his suggestion; and so the child remained, and made a clean and tidy little servant—exchanging evil influences for good ones.

On his return to the Grange, he found Nellie still amongst the pictures, Rose and Kate having had too much to say to each other to wish to disturb her. But when he put his hand from behind him, and showed her the prim-roses, she was up in a minute, and screamed and squealed again, and gave him all the kisses that he asked for.

So they had great fun at dinner, and dessert as well;

and then he had to romp with her, and be her horse, or ponnee rather, and scratch round the room—the youngster on his back, and kicking stoutly. Then tea and games, and then she was half done over, and went off fast asleep upon his knee. So he did not wake her until Rose was ready; when he kissed the darling, and she went to bed.

And the next day was an equally jolly one for the youngster; for there were the fowls and the rabbits, and the dogs and the horses, and the cows and the pigs, and all sorts of things to be seen; and the swans and the ducks, and the moor-hens; and the peacocks too, and the little guinea-pigs. It was a great day for her. And Kate took Rose for a drive; so they had lots of gossip by themselves; and Archer trotted about with Nellie, and put her securely in the swing that was fastened under the cedars; and then he fed the pigeons on the lawn, for her to see them; and took her to look at Kate's doves, and the love-birds in the conservatory; and showed her the little fishes in the brook, where it ran through the grounds to the pool.

In fact, it was such a morning of trotting about, that Rose made her go to sleep on the sofa as soon as dinner was over, as it was a ten-miles' drive to Hazelwood, and she was afraid she would be knocked up before they got there. Archer and Rose and Kate had therefore time to talk matters over, without the interruptions of Miss Nellie, who, if she caught but one word, wanted to know everything.

At last, after an early tea, so as to be home by seven, the time came for them to start; when, after Nellie had touched all the harness on the pony, and everything seemed to her to be put on properly and to her satisfaction, she then wanted to be off immediately; so while Kate and Rose were having last words together, John Archer got in the pony-carriage with her, to let the youngster help him to drive round the lawn.

And then, parting being over, off with some good-bye kisses went Miss Nellie, Rose being driver, but she hold of reins; and down the lane, ay, nearly to the church, they still could hear the music of her tongue—a dear good child, a happy little thing!

“Rose is a nice girl,” said Kate, as they turned into the house; “and I hope she will be very happy.”

“Yes, so do I,” said Archer; “and as for that young Nellie, she is a little love!”

“That's certain,” said Kate—“a perfect darling!”

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FIND AT BRAMLEY GORSE, AND THE KILL AT BRANKSTONE.

Two days before the meet at Bramley Gorse, John Archer had a letter from his cousin Will Warren, a young farmer who lived under the Bredon hills, and who hunted in the Cotswold country, to say that he would be at the Grange that night, Archer having told him, if he wanted to "see what woodland hounds were like," to come and have a spin with those in his country, and to lose no time about it, as, with the exception of the last day's fixture, Cumpton Common, Bramley was now the only one left within distance; and as it was one of the crack meets of the Hunt, being always a sure find and a famous place to get away from, he could not do better; and that he should have the brown horse for a mount.

So on the morrow morning, after his arrival at the Grange, he and Archer had a turn out together, Archer on his black mare—"a clipping animal for our stone walls," said Warren—and Warren on Archer's brown horse; when, after calling on Charlie Burton at Boscabel, six miles from there, and going on with him after lunch from there to the Quarry Farm, that was at the extremity of the parish, Holme Wood, and close to the river, they—Burton, Warren, and Archer—had a quiet bit of steeple-chasing across country together, back to Grantley, to try their horses; Charlie having promised to return and dine with them, as Warren was a friend of his, who always gave him some good shooting at his place, the Moat Farm, in the season; Burton returning the compliment in the covers at Boscabel. Archer also had shooting at the farm for a time or two in the season, Warren returning with him; but not caring for "such a lot" of stone wall as he got out there, he seldom hunted in that country; and also because, as he said, "we have plenty of hills at home, Will, and too many of them, without going a distance for them."

"Well," said Warren, as they got off their horses at the Grange, "there is no mistake about this brown horse, John, and I will ride him to-morrow."

"And I," said Archer, "will try the black mare. From the way she took me over the timber just now, as we

skulked across Robinson's grounds, I think she can do something beside stone walls, old fellow."

"Ay, anything you like to put her at," said Warren.—"Burton," said he, "that's a clever little mare of yours."

"Yes," said Charlie, "she is; and as good as she is good-looking."

The next morning, they—Archer and Warren—were off betimes, and they met Burton at the cover-side.

"Now, Master Willie," said Archer, as the dog-pack came up—just twenty couples, and all black-and-tan, and picked for points—"what do you think of that little lot for hounds—strong-built, deep-made, wide-loined, legs straight and square, and with feet as round as apples."

"Well, they are hounds," said Warren; "they are beauties!"

"I should think they are, indeed," said Archer. "That's Hector, the prominent one in the group," said he, indicating a hound in front of him, and alluding to the picture of "Will and the Hounds," that he had unpacked overnight to let Warren see it. "A fine hound, is he not?"

"Yes," said Warren; "and so is that one by Warne's horse."

"That is another of them, Warren," said Archer.

"I helped at that picture," said Burton.

"What part, Charlie?" said Archer.

"The looking-on part, and the giver of the best of advice to you fellows," replied Burton.

And while they sat there by the cover-side, and Archer and Burton were gossiping with friends about them, Warren continued to look the hounds over; and the more he saw of them, the better he liked them; and he knew he was in for a good thing if they found, as, though the ground was heavy from a soaking rain throughout the night, he could see they were "mud-splashers," and that no dirt would stop them.

Old Hector, looking thoughtful and sedate, was on his haunches, sitting solidly, and watching every movement of the huntsman, as with loud voice he rated at the youngsters, so as to keep the pack in something like good order; and Ringwood, who was his half-brother, and a good one, stood by him whisking his stiff stern, and all impatience; while Warrior, with his legs against the gray, and his head

thrown back, and his keen eyes glistening, looked up at Will, and waited for the word to go and draw the gorse that lay before them—a gorse of sixty acres; Sir Charles, the Master, whose blood-bay was by, going in amongst them, as each hound came to call, for patting and caressing and good words, which they all had from him when they were out or feeding.

Will, at his signal, put them in the gorse just with a word or two, and then left them to themselves to draw it steadily—his usual course. And waiting on the turf outside the gorse, Warren continued to watch the hounds narrowly, to see if, as Archer said, they did “draw well,” or if they slurred it.

But there was not a sound yet, for they were silent workers, only the rustle of them as they moved briskly through the gorse; the older hounds bent only on their game, poking and jumping, with stained sterns and tips, under or over each strong spiky bush. Then two youngsters, mindful of their coats, slunk out, but were back into the gorse in a minute, as they heard the rate of the Second Whip of “Hoick, there! hoick! to cover, hoick! Jasper and Rackett!” and the crack of his whip, as he tried to reach them one for misbehaviour.

Before long, however, there was a whimper, and the bushes shook as the hounds looked up and dashed to it; then all at once the centre seemed alive, and hounds jumped up and sprang above the gorse, and whimpered too, leaping and darting each one past the other. Then a deep bay, old Hector's, made them fly; for each hound knew his voice, and what it meant. Again a bay from Hector; Ringwood too, and Rattler, Warrior, Rambler, and Defence, who made the gorse bend down and shake again, as they dashed on to Will the huntsman's cry of “Hoick together there! have at him, hoick!” The sterns that had been waving all about then vanished instantly; and in their stead the eager hounds were seen, each leaping to the spot where Hector stood, his comrades by him, quite sure too they had found.

The First Whip, Dick, then, with uplifted hand, signalled the fox's exit from the gorse; and with a screech that made each man's heart there beat all the faster, Will led the hounds to where the fox was seen; and to the Master's cry of “Gone away!” away they went, with

Will alongside, and with George behind, Dick getting on to where the fox was pointing.

"Steady, gentlemen," then cried Sir Charles; "now steady, please," as several of the horsemen seemed to push to try to get at once close up to hounds; "don't press them, please; give them their heads for once."

"Forrard! hoick forrard! forrard on!" cried Will, as each hound topped the fence into the meadows, and George gave jumping-powder to the youngsters hanging; "forrard, my beauties—forrard on, good hounds!"

Then, getting well away with all the pack, and sweeping down the grass-land in his stirrups, he touched the saddle as he neared the fence, and with a bound got over clean and clear; Sir Charles and Burton, Warren and John Archer, taking it also quickly, to get placed.

"John," said Warren, as he dropped "right" over a long pole that was in a hedgerow, "this brown horse can pick his legs up."

"Yes," said Archer, as he did a hogback with the black one; "and I don't think this mare means rattling the timber; she did that cleanly, and it was rather a nasty one."

"Hillo, you fellows!" cried Burton, as he came over the pleacher thud into the meadow by the side of them; "what, comparing notes already! Here, I'll give you a lead, if you want one." And pressing the bay mare with his knee, he sent her over the next fence splendidly—a ragged-topped bank and a big one—Warren and Archer getting well over it after him.

"Don't hurry, you fellows," said Burton, racing away from them, and bearing for a bit of level ground, to get a good take off at some rails; "there are lots behind you."

"We will take it out of you, young man, presently," said Warren; "don't you be too coxy; wait till we warm to it."

But Charlie was out of hearing, and alongside Will. They followed suit, however, over the rails, along with others; but four came down at them; and some more also at the brook that was beyond them; Stevens, who there came up with them, flying it, as a matter of course. And as the pace continued, the field began to get more select, and the loose horses increased in number; for the water-meadows about there were always a puzzler, especially

when—as it was then, from the heavy rain—the ground there was soft; for the rails that crossed them so frequently were both high and stiff, and ditched on each side of them; and there was no “give” in them if you did hit them. So that for a splendid scent, and with fast hounds, men had need to be well mounted to make much play, when the line was up there by the river.

“He’s a woodland fox,” cried Will; “his point is yonder; and that he’ll make unless Dick gets before him, and so blocks him off from that two hundred acres, where we should soon have fifty foxes up, and mess about all day, and p’raps do nothing. Ah, there he is,” said he, “along the hillside on a level with us, and he is riding like the deuce; he sees his game.”

Clear of the meadows, those well up went on, through lanes and pastures, making for the wood; the hounds at racing speed; when, with a cry just three fields from the cover, they suddenly swept round; then, level with it for a field or two, they widened out, and left the high ground for some stiff ground under.

“By Jove, we have him! Dick was just in time,” said Will, as he went over some low rails to reach the hounds, that then were in a meadow. Headed in time, the fox turned up the valley to gain some smaller covers by the water; the bend the hounds made letting in “the field”—at least, those of them who had nicked across, by gaps, and easy places, shirking big ones—and so the hounds got pressed; and then they checked.

Will, with a cast, soon put them on, however; and as the fox, when making for the water, got chivied by some lads, there out bird-tending, he turned again, and took up the water-meadows at a pace that very soon left all behind but flyers; and so for nearly the next three miles there were not more than twenty men there with them; but the trio—Archer, Warren, and Burton—were of the number.

“Hoick forrard! forrard hoick!” then shouted Will, as in a corner sheep showed, scared and huddled; “that is his line for certain, and he’s passed there only a minute, by their very look. Forrard, good hounds! hoick forrard!” And down went Will, as hard as he could pelt, straight for some awkward ox-rails in a pasture, and close to hounds. His good gray cleared them; but as he dropped he reeled, for it was boggy; but with a jump that was but

half a scramble, he took the fence beyond and reached the lane; the hounds in front of him.

Into this green by-lane came many more; one down a plunger—on some soil-tumps left there by confounded ditchers; and they wound along it underneath the hills.

“He is over, by the powers!” said Willie Warren, pounding by Archer on the big brown horse; “yonder the hounds go, up that slingit orchard, right for the cover, where they’ll change their fox, unless Dick is there, and they are close upon him.”

“Ah, Will, I see, is making for the bridge,” said Archer; “he has never fancied water since that good run they had from Henley Dingles that I told you of, where Charlie got the brush. Our best way now is straight along this lane; it is bog down yonder, and there is no ford near.”

“By turns a team-road, then a wide green lane, as farms were crossed or fields lay parallel; then as an up-and-down road on a common; then as a rutty road, then lane again, it ran up to the church, and met the main road, that led up to the bridge; and so beyond it, underneath the woods, that sloped down almost to the water’s edge.

But before Warren got to them, along with Archer, the hounds were clear away; up for the hills, or else deep in the woods, in the long hollows, where there was no hearing them; and so it was just chance work if, while they and others who were thrown out rode up the woods, the hounds did not meanwhile slip out with their fox along the bottom, and thus get away from them altogether.

However, as waiting events did not suit either of them, they took the first trig they came to, and pelted up the wood over the mossed turf, until they struck a ride; when following it for some distance, they heard the hounds; and they were running hard too, right along the bottom, as if to push the fox out at the end.

Just as Warren and Archer tightened rein for “down the wood,” a perfect chorus, swelling to a crash, sent its loud echoes up the hanging banks, and told them that their heads were turned towards them. And up a dell they came with louder cry, and “Tally O!” was heard off to the right, as some one viewed a fox across a dingle—the hunt one, luckily.

Turning their horses round in that direction, they took

a bridle-path—the first they came to on the right-hand side—that, winding, led them to a sloping meadow that lay between the wood and banky orchards; and there, within the fence, they stopped and waited.

“Hold hard, or we shall head him,” whispered Willie, as nearer to them “Tally O!” was heard, and sticks began to break, and pheasants fly, as drumming on, they sailed to safer quarters. “Those sheep are semicircling observations, and stand all massed together in the field; and jays,” said he, “are chattering; he is close at hand, be sure. By Jove, old fellow, but we have nicked it nicely!”

“Hush! quiet for your life,” said Archer, “for here he comes!”

And there for certain was the game hunt fox just entering the field above the orchards; and right through all the sheep, as they divided, on came the artful beggar straight towards them, trying to make his point once more in cover.

“Be still,” said Archer, “and just draw back a bit. He will come up here, you’ll find, to reach the Firs.” And not fifty yards ahead he passed before them, with his brush well out, and with lots of “go” still in him; and looking as unconcerned as if out airing, being quite oblivious that they were so near him.

Scarce able to suppress a ringing cheer, Will Warren gripped his reins and grinned again; and the brown horse, as he too spied the fox, shook his ‘cute head, and snorting pricked his ears, and pawed the turf, and backed against the trees, hot and impatient to be off and onwards.

Quick up the hedgerow, slipping through the briers, Warren cut off Master Reynard from the wood—before he had time to find another for them, to rest himself—and put his black nose fairly for the hill—a wide-topped sheep-walk, ending in a gorse, that dipped there steeply to a horseshoe valley; then shouted “Gone away!” with cap held high, and waited for the hounds.

Down through the apple-trees they came with Will, to sound of voice and horn, and “Forrard on!” and scrambling on the fence, jumped in the meadow, and steamed along, with grass half up their sides, to where Warren waited for them at the top, with Archer.

“Forrard, forrard on! yoicks forrard!” shouted Will, as straggling hounds came crushing through the fern,

George at their back; "farrard, good hounds! hoick for rard!" And through and over the high fence they went, on to the springy turf outside the wood, and scoured along, with heads held straight and up, and scent breast-high; old Hector leading them, and Rambler next, and Rattler whimpering when thong-released from briers that held him, as Burton and Sir Charles both jumped the fence, and others followed them.

The leading horsemen now were well with hounds, and hounds well on, tearing along the green hill-top full cry, straight for the gorse-patch at the other end, that facing westward, clothed the steep descent; a bit, they said, "where foxes watched for hounds." This gorse soon held the fox, and the hounds then checked; for it was thick and strong, and sheep too were about; and lots of horsemen then soon got loosed up, though thinned in number; for many were still pounded in the wood, in holding clays and spongy turf and bog, or else were waiting still along the bottom, not knowing that the hounds were out and off.

A cheer from Will, and then out dashed the hounds, with reddened sides and tips, that showed their work; as, ever watchful, Dick soon viewed the fox; and in a minute most of the men there were off their horses, and leading down the hill, sliding and skating and running to the valley; the pitch there being too steep for any riding, until they were well in the flat; when jumping into the saddle again, each one there made play all he could, for the hounds were in sight, and running well together, a few fields on, and making for the Firs.

"Well, this is good!" cried Warren, dropping safely over a big place, where some nearly caught it. "Come up, you varmint!" and a thonger brought him clear of a nasty fir-pole in a fence—his second one—that, had he touched it, he would have come to "grief."

"Steady, old man," said Archer; "there's work before us; I know the ground."

And so there was, and sharp work too, as they all soon found. Down went Sir Charles, and down too came Dick Hunt, with Clay and Holland very nearly on them; Burton, who followed, making a recover from the bog that held them, as Wells and Stevens skirted it with Warden, and Andrews purred. A rail and blackthorn bit just on beyond was topped by Warren, and John Archer followed;

and as he cleared it, Stevens dropped and passed him, eager, no doubt, to be first at the water, which threatened by the willows in the flat.

"In luck for once!" cried Warren; "a famous pilot, if we at least have steam left in to follow. Come on, my boy, and try a hydropathic!"—true words in jest.

Hounds now were running very nearly mute, and only gave tongue as they streamed in file up from the water, and on along the banks, that bordered a deep wide brook that coursed about there. Led on by Stevens, who as usual did it, they both went at it, and they both got down; Warren popping in the centre like a shot, with a splash that hid him, and Archer grassed—the mare dropped short, and ploughed along for yards; then turning over, missed him by an inch.

"Out of the way, you acrobatic beggars!" sang out Jack Horton, as he too dropped by them. "Confound this country! there's no room for rolling; third place, and crowded! since we left the wood. I have had but two—a drop fence and some railings—well to myself. Deuce of a bit of comfort is there in it!"

Said Archer as he mounted, "You are just like Jackson; he too believes in rolling; and judges sport by the falls he has. Down half a dozen good ones, 'first-rate day;' without a fall, 'but very middling sport.'

"Such is his creed," said Archer to Will Warren, who, having scrambled out, went on again; "a random, reckless rider, with rare good hands and seat, but lacks cool head and judgment; and more's the pity, as he knows not fear.

"I saw him once," said Archer, as they rode, "ride at a pig's-cot place—a long and ugly jump, as you may fancy—merely because it came within his stride. 'As though for that old pig I'd twist my mare. Had I not cleared the pork, the worse for him,' was his reply when we remonstrated, as he came down over a line beyond, where clothes were hanging, that draped him nicely as he rose again. Now put the steam on, Willie," Archer said; "you will soon get dry, old man—there are others in."

So on they went as hard as they were able; Warren quite dripping, and with his "pink" mud-clouded, that told where he had been—down at the bottom on the fish for eels! Horton, still growling, and Dick Hunt behind; Sir Charles as well, who had come safely over, along with

Burton, and some other good ones. The hounds were still making for the Firs, and they reached it and went through it, for the scent was good, and the fox almost in sight; and over the fields beyond, and through the spinnies, that running up the flat had famous lying.

Bearing from there once more across the open, they got the brook again, through bend and twist, and this time did it, as it was sounder ground; two only of the lot going in a souser. Then hounds were seen—the sluggards of the pack—just one field on. And gaining on them, those who were best mounted, they passed them, and passed George; and then they saw the rest, the leading hounds, along with Will, “in body,” racing just as if they viewed him!

“Now then, you Grantley men, room for Holme Wood here, if you please,” cried Burton, as he raced between the pair of them, and took a stile that was ahead of them. “Here’s straight to hounds, my boys!”

“Let us take the nonsense out of him, John,” said Warren, as he gave the brown horse the spur; which, as it was an implement he was not used to, he bolted; and taking his rider partly as he pleased for the next two minutes, he cannoned against Burton, and turned him over, mare and all; Archer jumping the fence as he lay there, with “Grantley Grange to your notice, Charlie.”

“I could not help it, John; this brown horse bolted,” said Warren, as he got a hold of him; “I spurred him.”

“And so astonished him; I never spur,” said Archer; “but as for Charlie, bless you he won’t mind it! He is as hard as nails, and never makes a fuss. We will keep the lead, though, now, if you’ll come on.”

A thread around some buildings let them up; and with the hounds they rode across some farms, and hung about the rickyards, sheds, and places, each one they came to; for the fox was beaten, and trying all he could to skulk and hide; but just as he showed, with his brush trailing, and it seemed like running into him—under the wall of Brankstone Church, outside the village—a sheep-dog at a cottage that was near came with a rush and fairly turned him over; but shutting up at that, the fox escaped; and as fear then lent him pace, he gained on hounds.

But not for long. The people now were out, in gardens, fields, and folds, and on the road; and thus by one or other every minute the fox was viewed, then mobbed;

and so he went "to ground" in an old drain that emptied in a ditch, out in a meadow by some large farm-buildings. This vexed all of them who were then up, as it let in the laggards, and thus put the slow ones level with the flyers. However, as it stood, all thought it tidy—"two hours and twenty minutes" from the find, and much on grass; and fast enough for all but perfect gluttons.

Sending for a terrier and some spades and mattocks, Will drew the hounds off; hoping to have a run-in for the finish, and so end it decently.

A rattling "view" soon told them he was out, when, with a start of two long fields from there, Will put the hounds on; and had not the foot-people yelled as they did, there might have been perhaps ten minutes' spurt; but as it was, "Who-whoop!" Sir Charles cried; and with that 'twas over.

He kept the brush himself for little Lester, who, on a cob, in spite of several falls, held on most pluckily, till distance told; the groom then made him stop, and trotted homewards.

"A worthy scion of a famous sire," Sir Charles said. "He will make a man in time, and do us credit."

CHAPTER XXXI.

JOHNSON AND THE GIPSIES—ENDALL-ON-THE-HILL.

"THEN now for Endall, John, if you are ready," said Johnson, who had walked from the Rosary with his sister, to keep his appointment with Archer, and to leave Jessie with Kate for a long day's gossip. "How far do you call it?"

"How far is it, Kate, Endall-on-the-hill?" said Archer.

"Eight miles," said Kate, "over the commons, and six through the woods. I thought," said she, "you had been there, John, lots of times. The end of the world, the people call it."

"So that fellow at the Peyton Arms said. No, Kate, I have not, strange to say; for though I have been all round it, I never," said he, "was through it; but why I am sure I cannot tell you."

"Oh," said Kate, "it is worth seeing, quite an old-fashioned place, and with no road beyond it. The high-road ends there."

"Why, when did you go there?" said Archer.

"Years ago, John," said Kate, "when you were at your uncle's in London, fidgeting on your high stool, and trying to be a lawyer."

"Now don't," said Archer; "I don't like to look back to it."

"And twice since then," said she; "once for a drive with aunt, and the other time was when we had a picnic in the woods there; but you were away, John, each time. I think you will like it."

"Well, then, let us be off now, Johnson. We shall have none too much time, I know. Miss Johnson, can you and Kate here get through the day without us, do you think?"

"The vanity of the man!" said Kate. "We will try to, won't we, Jessie? I think we shall survive it."

"Ay, my absence, I know," said Archer; "but I said 'we;' still, if you should feel disconsolate, Johnson I know can console you, if I cannot."

"There, get along with you, you saucy fellow!" said Kate.

"Never mind, old man," said Archer; "if you do hang behind when we start, I won't look back."

"Thanks," said Johnson; "but we don't need it, do we, Kate?" said he, kissing her. "We don't mind you, you know."

"So it seems," said Archer; "you are a bold young couple!"

"And if my young cousin were here," replied Johnson, "we should see a bolder. You are a bad boy, John. I cannot think how it is Jenny is so fond of you!"

"No, it is strange," said Archer, "is it not? Well, come on. Good morning, ladies," said he, as he went to the door. "I won't look back, Kate; and if I hear a sound, I will think it is the love-birds."

"So it will be," said Jessie, laughing, "for they are both here by me."

"Yes, and without wings," said Archer. "Johnson, I am waiting." So Johnson joined him, and they started.

"Then Warren left you early this morning?" said Johnson.

"At seven," said Archer; "he wanted to catch the fast train, to save fretting his mare by the stoppages."

"He likes the hounds, then?"

"I should think he does," replied Archer. "I wanted him very much to stay for Cumpton, just two days hence, the tenth; but he could not. We had a famous evening at Charlie's yesterday, and talked about the run and all the tumbles."

"You were all down, were you not, you three?" said Johnson.

"For once we were, that's certain," Archer said.

"John, gipsies! a magic word for you," remarked old Johnson.

"And good ones too," said Archer, as he saw them, camped beyond him. "It is a pity that you have not brought your block. If you will stay and chum with me to-night, we would come up here and sketch them in the morning. Those seem two very jolly daughter gipsies, young bold-faced hussies, and they would do right well, toned down a bit to look less impudent. They would light up well against a bit of blue," said Archer, "and camp surroundings. Let us go and chaff the old woman," said he, "and ask her for some hedgehog."

"Hedgehog?" said Johnson. "What do you mean by that?"

"Why, hedgehog. Have you never tasted hedgehog?" Archer asked; "hedgehog and woodpecker?"

"No, nor you, I should think," said Johnson. "I remember, when we were in Rome though, seeing woodpeckers at the poulterers'; but I never knew them to be eaten in these parts."

"They are eaten by the gipsies," said Archer; "first skinned, and then broiled, and are good, but bitter; but hedgehogs are a delicacy, that's very certain. They do them up in clay, and bake it well; then break it up, and off come all the prickles."

"Ah, I remember now," said Johnson; "Borrow names it."

"And I have tasted it," said Archer. "The one is like sucking-pig, and the other grouse. Those people know what's good."

"Why, they have an owl with them," said Johnson; "they don't eat owls as well, surely?"

"Just as likely," said Archer. "I believe they will eat any mortal thing in fur or feathers; but that is a tame one, evidently. I will tell you about owls," said he, "presently.

"If I were you," continued he, as they sat on the bank for a rest, halfway up the common, and spied the old crone coming towards them with a pipe in her mouth, "I would sketch the lot of them. Those bright-eyed gipsy-girls, with sunburnt faces, would make a picture even as they are, lolling at full length by that large wood-fire, with the thick smoke drifting to the tents behind, and throwing a shadow on that spavined gray that you see grazing there, along with the donkeys that are tethered by him. Let us go across, and meet the old woman.

"Well, mother," said Archer, as they got up to her, "is it true you eat hedgehogs?"

"When we can catch them, your honour," said she, with her old gray eyes twinkling at the thought of it. "Let me tell your fortune; you have a beautiful hand for a fortune; the lines run so well," said she, unceremoniously taking hold of it; "and so has the captain there, I know."

"Ah," said Archer, "he is a naval officer in the army — 'The First Bidoons.' He fought at Waterloo and Navarino, and he is lined all over with medals, and scored with scars."

"He do look like a gallant gentleman, that's sure," said the old one.

"Pull yourself together, Johnson, and cough stoutly," said Archer; "and look the character, and cry 'eyes right!' She believes in you."

"And won't the gallant captain let a poor gipsy-woman tell him his destiny?" said the old one, wheedling alongside him. "There be beautiful lines on that palm," said she.

"Tell away then," said Johnson; "and let me have as much as you can of it for sixpence."

The result was this: that "his lady, with the golden hair, would marry him in three years, but would then run away with a dark man," and so on; and as Archer also had his palm manipulated, he was informed that "his dark-haired love would marry him very soon, and be very settled and tidy."

"Confound you," said Johnson, "you have mixed them up! Mine is the dark-haired one, and this gentleman's the light one."

"You'll have to change 'em, then," said the old woman, "for you can't beat destiny."

"Well, there's one comfort," said Archer, "mine will be settled and tidy. Yours, Johnson, is to be the run-away."

"Yes," said Johnson; "we will tell Kate about that." And they went up to the camp to the gipsies.

The men kind—three—were busy sliving sticks and making clothes-pegs, and some wicker-baskets; the woman smoking while she filled the kettle, her fortune-telling business being over. Two of the children, copper-coloured brats, with jet-black eyes, were holding in a lurcher; the other youngster, with a daisy chain, was sprawling towards her dark-eyed olive sisters, the tame owl by her.

Behind, their cart pushed in it, was a quarry, with sandstone slabs about, gray-shadowed by the boughs that hung above it; backed by a fir-wood of a deep-blue green, and gorse around. In front, against the turf, a gleam of light, caught from the sky, was glimmering in the water, that trickled from a rill through moss and leaves, and dropped down from the bank, by dripstones, to the road.

"I really think you would make a picture of it," said Archer, as they left the camp, after a chat with the gipsy-girls, and some scowls from the men; "if you took the girls only, just for the sake of their figures; town-rigged, we'll say, in scarlet cloaks, that you could make just nicely faded; and with long gold ear-rings, and gay orange scarfs, and with all their blue-black hair about their shoulders."

"Ah, you are thinking of those Andalusian girls you made so much of in olden days," said Johnson. "I must say I prefer your rough-and-ragged ones. They, if you like, are picturesque, and come well. How well those firs tell up against the distance! With just that right light blocked, it would not make a bad bit for an oblong, to match that little one I have just rubbed in. The red pines there," said he, "just balance those dark firs. But what about that owl?"

"Nothing about him," said Archer; "it is owls in

general, or rather, one in particular, that I meant—Tommy Trotter's owl. You know Trotter, Johnson; he works at Wade's?"

"I don't know that I do," said he; "but what of him and his owl? They are not particularly lively birds; in fact, their screech is horrid. I thought it was a child being well-nigh murdered the first time that I heard it."

"You are not the first to think so," Archer said. "Their 'who, who!' too is apt to be mistaken. It settled Trotter. It was in this way, Johnson. One night he got a skinful at his club, and so came wobbling home across the fields—those fields just past the Rectory, I mean, that take you through the dingles—slightly pugnacious and self-satisfied; when, as he half rolled over that old gate into the Rye-Grass by the big Ox Leasowe, his toe caught something, and then down he went, and stayed there, till, stupid and confused, he tried once more to stand upon his legs, then blundered on into the ditch and fell.

"'Man lost!' sings he. 'Who, who!' replies an owl. 'Man lost, I say!' 'Who, who!' still cries the owl; when Tommy, getting in a towering passion, shouts, 'Tommy Trotter!' 'Who, who! who, who!' the cry. 'Why, Tommy Trotter; caun't thee hear, thee feule?' 'Who, who!' 'Confound thee!' said the fellow, 'I be Trotter, as works at Meyster Wade's—the big house theer; I'se lost!'

"But as the cry, 'Who, who!' was still continued, and no help nigh, down in the ditch he muddled till the morning; when, as the other men came by to work, they picked him up, and heard about 'the wretch' who had, he said, kept asking who he was, yet never helped him! So ever since then, when they hear the owls down in these diggings, Johnson, what they say is this: 'There's Tommy Trotter come! Who, who! who, who!'"

So Johnson laughed, and said it "served him right."

"Hold hard a moment," said Archer, as they got to the cross-roads; "look down the lane, Johnson. There's a picture for you, old fellow: 'When found make a note of it.' Roofs at odd levels, thatch and tile and slate; and gable-ends half-timbered, black and brown; blue sky, white pigeons, shades of green and gray; and deep-red ruts, with timber, fowls, and figures; a breadth of shadow,

and a width of light, with just one gleam upon some wayside water! Not a bad bit—a mental memo, that.”

“Yes,” Johnson said; “I wish we had the blocks.”

And as they continued up the lanes for Endall, they saw lots of “bits” equally suitable for pictures; and had it not been that they had partly decided on having a two or three weeks’ “out” together up the valley, for Shipley and beyond there, they would certainly have made a day in that neighbourhood.

“It will be very jolly,” said Archer, “if even I don’t do much sketching, for I like to watch you at your outdoor work; you look so terribly in earnest, Johnson. On one of your ‘gray days,’ with moving clouds, to see you stab the greensward is a sight! Up goes the easel, down comes the umbrella, and under it you are, just like a hermit; glued to your camp-stool, lost to all the world, and quite oblivious that your pipe is empty.”

“I do more work than you, you lazy fellow,” said Johnson. “Bells, bells?” said he, pricking his ears.

“Yes, bells,” said Archer, “and teams jingling them, I expect, as the lanes seem so narrow here. You see, Johnson, I cannot paint, or I would.”

“Now is it compliments you are going in for?” said Johnson; “because you know that is all nonsense. You have an eye for colour and effect, and can see what form is, and you can sketch it too; and you also have a very good idea of all components needed for a picture. Don’t you be silly, John. I have seen you with a hog-hair tease a colour, and drag and twist it all about your canvas in first-rate style; to fill or cover ‘accidental forms’ your eyes saw quickly; and all I can say is, that it is in you. Work, work, man, work; there is nothing done without it. When we go to the Lakes, now take your block. You will find it very pleasant—you and Jane—when we come back, to look your sketches over, and have our rambles day by day again. I mean to make you work—and so I told her—when we set off for our ‘out’ up the valley; and that won’t be long first.”

“Ah, Johnson, I am a lazy dog, I know,” said Archer. “Here are the teams, then.”

And as he spoke, they both stepped in a gateway, in a deep lane, with uncut hedges and great trailing briars, while two teams passed them; great sturdy fellows,

with long manes and tails, who tossed their heads and shook their little bells; a jingling warning to all teams in front to turn again or wait; for you could hear their melody before you saw them. And on the narrow bridge that crossed the river—at the foot of the steep hill that led to Endall—there were angular recesses—"safety spots," where those on foot could stand aside and wait, while the broad-wheeled wagons slowly passed along.

At last, having got to the top of the hill, Johnson stopped with Archer to have a look at the magnificent view from there, and the vast sweep of country that they could see over. And as they entered the village, they found it, as Kate said, "old and old-fashioned," and that the turnpike road ended there, as though that were the last spot there inhabited; the only road beyond there, so they were told, being a bridle-road, through gates and wickets all along the hills, and leading to a hamlet some miles off, that was on a main road from another quarter. All that they saw there was, in fact, quite primitive.

Seats on the village-green beneath tall elms, and a maypole in the centre, with bits and remnants of dead garlands on it, still tied there; and the turf at foot, withered and ragged, where the villagers had danced on each May-day. And by the green a clumsy-looking pound, used by the schoolboys in their little battles as a safe prison-place for all those they vanquished. And near it were some stocks, half-hidden by great dock-leaves and some nettles, with all the irons rusty from disuse.

In sight, too, were some dovecots in a field, stone-built and a story high, and round about them quite a cloud of birds. And there was a sound of flails too, with sharp "flip-flap," there thrashing out the wheat; and they saw a strapping milkmaid out in the open, with her pail, "a-milking," just as in olden days.

Some horseshoes too were nailed there over doors, as safeguards from all witches and hobgoblins; and the village signs stood out upon the road, set in the turf—the Woodman, Hop-pole, Ring of Bells, and Oak—high upon cross-trees, and quite grand affairs; and in the gardens there were old black yews, close-cropped and cut into odd shapes, and peacocks.

And in the centre of the village was a draw-well, under a fern-bank, and with young ferns in it, growing below

the rim. And they stayed to look at it, as worth a sketch; for some girls—bright rosy ones—were by it, with their cans, rattling the bucket down, and waiting turn beneath a penthouse of some stained old boards; and who, as Johnson said, were “grouped artistically.” They blushed and laughed as Archer chatted to them; then filled their cans, and poised them on their heads; and as they moved off, each one made “a study;” for they were tall and shapely, fine-grown, buxom girls, upright as darts, and with a springy step.

“What splendid models, Johnson!” Archer said; “there seems a nest of them in this old place; so healthy-looking too, and such a move! I wish we had the blocks; we could have sketched them.”

Right in the village was an old gray church, with shingle spire, and built of travertine; with great yews round it, and a high churchyard, with steps up to it. And farther on “the inn,” the sign a Reaper, a tumble-down old place of beams and plaster, where were four bay horses, with their nosebags off, slaking their thirst; while pigeons, white and pied, with their lustrous colours shining in the sun, flew from the roof or fluttered to the road under the horses’ feet, for fallen oats, and scarcely moving as the people passed. And to each ale-house was an entrance-porch, with seats within it jutting from the wall, and a long drinking-trough set in the front, near to the stables and the mounting-block.

The larger farms were moated; one had two, with some fir-tree mounds on either side the buildings; and buttressed walls mossed all about and creviced—the silent witnesses of troublous times, when all that country was so sacked for forage, and trenches dug that long had greened with grass.

By the wayside there were some stepping-stones, flat in a brook, which, gurgling from the fields, ran on and turned again; for no one thought of cutting off the bend, to dry the road. “It always was there in their fathers’ time, and so would do for them.” Round by the churchyard was a large farmyard, near to the Reaper stables, with huge barn-doors, and stoats and magpies on them; and up the village was a reedy pool, open to the road, and often covering it, with long railed footbridge for the passers-by.

And two old places there that served for shops, were overhanging; and with the same date on them of "1600" as was carved upon a porch a stone's throw from them, at a farmhouse that was outside the village, and that had heaps of ivy all about it.

There they had lunch: some good home-brewed and nice brown-bread and cheese; the farmer telling them of full-length brasses that were in the church, and also monuments, in memory of men who, in the Civil Wars, fought for their king. They could not see them though, for the blacksmith was the clerk, and he was out, and the parson lived elsewhere.

So they went on, past a big wainhouse and a timber-waggon, into a pasture and a wide green lane, that was sweet with spring odours from the woods and fields; and so by orchards that would soon be covered with white and red-and-white and cream-like bloom, and shower their petals with each passing breeze into the chequered lush-grass underneath, on orchis-blossoms of pale fawn and purple, which there were dotted thickly all about. And they went on through the green lanes and the fields to reach the woods that, bending to the right, ran all along beneath that range of hills to within a mile or so of Grantley village.

Then passing through an old gray gate, half off its hinges, they entered a lane that narrowed between some coppicing, and hemmed them in with a flutter of dead leaves on mossed red banks, that were thickly clumped with primroses; which also blossomed on each side in the copse, tangled with spring flowers and with leafy sprays under the brambles and the hanging boughs, where the birds were singing, the tinkling murmur of a little rill filling up their pauses.

And at the end, where this mossed lane branched off, there was a high stone stile, with nothing but dense foliage to be seen beyond it, except just where, between the upper branches, the blue hills showed. And there they sat some time, with no sound but the sound of birds about them.

Taking the path, as they had been directed, down at the bottom of the rocky steps, they turned for Grantley; the pathway winding through fern-banks and trees, by depths of brushwood and by sheets of colour—long lengths

of blue, and white and primrose patches—that lit the greenery of the woods for miles, as they, still keeping to the path, got lower and lower; the openings in the trees at every turn showing some fresh bit of thorough woodland beauty, and glimpses of high hills that closed the valley.

And listening, they soon heard the sound of a weir that was below them; for the river there was close beneath the wood; and presently they saw the long bright sunny meadows through the trees, and then the water, making a white waved line as it wound along them.

Then, reaching the bottom of the woods, they kept within their shadows through the fields, that shelved down from them in sweeps of cool green, tenanted by rabbits. And while they listened to the birds that sang so lustily—the woods seemed full of them—and caught the rosy tinge along the sky, they saw between the trees old Grantley tower; and soon they reached the outskirts of the village, and got back home, all in good time for dinner, after a pleasant walk of fourteen miles.

And as they came up the drive, they saw the ladies on the lawn before them; and not long afterwards they were all at dinner, Johnson telling Kate what the gipsy said; so they were very merry. Then, after dinner, they all came out again, and sat together under the verandah, and watched the lights upon the fine old elms, that were aglow and purpling in the setting sun; and they stayed and talked there.

“Look yonder, Johnson, at that ‘Danby’ bit,” said Archer, “behind the cedars. Fine colour there! What lines of red and gold, like liquid fire, through those forked branches and deep purple greens! You cannot think what jolly moons I have up at that little window in the ivy, watching the tints of evening come and go, and glow and blend, and change and fade away into the hazy dull dim gray of night. And those trees, too, by the pool, Johnson, black where the sun has dipped: how fine their purple! And ah, here come our sable friends,” said he, “the rooks, across the gold, beneath the green and gray. They are overdue; the birds are in already up above. Just hark their clamour!”

And as the ladies had their warm shawls brought them, they sat there till the moon rose; Archer and Jessie

having a great gossip on art matters, and Kate and Johnson talking in too low a tone for what they said to be audible; but as they both thought that there was "no need to go in yet," when Archer proposed an adjournment to the drawing-room, it may be supposed that they were mutually interested in each other's conversation.

Then, when the moon was high in the blue sky over them, Johnson kissed Kate, and went back with Jessie to the Rosary.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CUMPTON COMMON—THE LAST DAY OF THE SEASON.

THE end of the hunting season was now at hand; for the morrow's fixture, Cumpton Common, was the last on the list.

And as John Archer sat alone at the Grange, thinking of the days that he had had with hounds that season, he felt the regret which every good sportsman does feel when the hunting is over; and his thoughts travelled back from the various "good things" through the many months to those jolly frost-smelling, hop-picking sort of mornings, when, as he used to say, every ride to hounds seemed to put "new life" into him; and he looked on the morrow as a calamity—an unwelcome ending to much real pleasure—a break in exercise, a break amongst acquaintances, and a total break in so much that was enjoyable.

It is only hunting men who can understand this feeling; not your mere man who "goes out" hunting, but the men who hunt for the very love of it, and because it is the most manly of all sports, and so thoroughly English in its dash and daring; men who can ride, and who know but the one rule, "to go where the hounds go;" men whose natural love for horses is fostered by it, and their own genuine pluck brought out by it; men who, as a rule, would do anything and dare everything, short of telling a lie or doing a shabby action; gentlemen, in fact, and Englishmen, whose country pleasure, hunting, sneered at as it often is by the stay-at-homes—men who know not the joy of a good horse, nor could handle him if they had him—has not been without its influence in the service of their

country, and in the thickest of the fight; for men who can habitually "go straight" across country know not what fear is, nor when they are beaten—qualities that any man may find useful "when the time comes."

And Archer himself was such a man—a thorough straight-goer and a gentleman, every inch of him—and he appreciated the pleasures of the hunting-field none the less that they so constantly contributed to his love of the country, and his extreme fondness for the beautiful in nature. The enjoyment of the day with him was simply doubled; he enjoyed the sport, and he loved the scenery; and while his health was improved by it, his perceptive faculties were exercised and gratified.

So as he sat there by his study-fire on this evening—the eve of the "last day"—the season and its incidents all came back to him most vividly; even to the quiet rides to cover, the scenes upon the road, and the constant charm that they were to him of form and colour. And he called to mind how, on those hunting-mornings, he used to notice that which, at other times, he should have passed unheeded; and he could only account for it by the leisurely pace of his horse, and the healthy fresh feeling that always seemed to make him keenly alive to all that was around him; heightened possibly, with him, by his love of nature, and his fondness for the picturesque; for on those occasions few things, however trivial, escaped him, from the setting out to the place of meeting; for he took note of everything.

The saucy rooks, beside the plodding team, hopping with lazy wings on upturned soil; the carter's whip, ringing with echo, and with sharpened crack; the humid hedgerows, cobwebby and sparkling, showing wealth of colour in their autumn leaves; the hoar-frost whitened turf, green only where the gipsies struck their tents and wended townwards; hooking on leaving odd bits on the thorns, as signs to others.

The startled hare, as, turning with dropped ear at sight of him, she scudded up the road, and through the meuse—then cantered up a furrow to the end, to slouch and listen; the whir of partridges, the call of pheasants, and dartings to and fro of many rabbits; the distant cackle of some farmyard fowls, and clank of gates; the sluggish mist, wreathing round coppice boundaries like a fog, and blue

smoke curling up from cottages. All these—the trivial incidents he saw—he well remembered.

The village children too, all off to school, with cheeks like apples, roseate in hue; and the old grandame with the whitened hair, as, creeping to the spring with tottering steps, she lit the green lane with her winter cloak. The carrier also, with his old gray horse; the postman, with his horn; the blacksmith in the smithy at the turn, clinking on anvil for the waiting team; the noisy geese, hissing with outstretched necks, in crossing from the common to the pool; the dappled kine, pausing by the roadside at each bit of grass, when changing pasture; the V-shaped flight of wild ducks from the north, and starlings rising with a rush and chatter.

Those grand hills too, how plainly he could see them—getting still clearer and still more defined, as all their purples changed to blues and grays. The autumn tints too—the amber, gold, and russets of the woods—late blending with the greens, from beech to yew, that then were fading into grays and browns, soon to be whitened by the winter's snow. All these, and many more things, he used to see, and seeing, note.

Then, as he got near the meet, the village church would show, against the darker background, sharp and clear; and the narrow river, winding through the valley, like a white ribbon or a silken thread; the meadows too, that next the plough looked bright by very contrast. And half-timbered houses, cottages, and farms—white, red, and umber—would come upon the view; by road, in gardens, and amidst old trees, noisy with rooks.

And horsemen would be met at every turn—recalled to mind the while he sat there thinking; and how he often used to look them over—their horses also. The quiet man, whose horse, till hounds are off, never turns a hair; his opposite, the rusher, fretting his steed before a hound is nigh; the neat and dapper man, with bits like silver, and without a speck; his opposite also, with rusty bars to hold him when he falls, and lengthened heels to tempt an over-reach.

And then the horses, they too were criticised. How this one had legs like whipcord, and a snake-like head; and that looked like a goer, with one white stocking and a blaze in front; a third, the model of a cob, short legs, round barrel, handsome, hard, compact.

And he also remembered how, as others joined the throng, he would pick them out. The horse he liked the best or most disliked; the one a gentleman may ride, the perfect hunter; the lady's horse all over, with right leg first, and broken well to hounds; the shifty wretch too, with the swinging tail, and backward eyes and ears, kicking and squealing like one in a fair, and the little Shetland, with the lad from school, who would block the gaps for all the lag-behinds; and Missie, with the leading-rein and groom, to stay till hounds had found, then home again.

The burly farmer, with the dark-brown tops, whose weight was twenty stone; and the village rector, of the good old school, as orthodox in pigskin as in pulpit, who dealt anathemas to those on wheat. The two lawyers also from the county-town, and the officers from barracks; and Sir John and Major Tippettop, Young Hardiman, and others; and the doctor, with the patient "on the road," who knew the short-cuts, and would see the run. The horse-breaker on frisky colt; the miller and the "vet.;" three ladies—two on ponies—with the Squire; grizzly his locks and rubicund his face, with bird's-eye tie, and skirts to claret stained—a first-flight man; the butcher's-boy on screw, nigh thoroughbred, who would doubtless race home for his present hindrance.

And then would come the Master of the hounds, and behind the pack, with the Huntsman and the Whips; and following them, a troop of noisy lads. Then, greetings with all around him, and a turning off to cover, with hopes to find.

All this came back to him as he sat there—this, and much more besides—while thinking of those early rides to cover, and all the incidents connected with them; and were it not that other thoughts came too, that mixed up J. for June with J. for Jane, and linked together roses with white blossoms, he really would have gone to bed quite fretched; for few but those who hunt know what a break there is from the middle of April to the next November, in spite of fishing, shooting, and some cubbing—a dreadful break—a sad farewell to many pleasant habits.

For then—for six months—must farewells be taken of all those early rides through dewy lanes, and all that social intercourse by cover, with men you had met at almost

every meet, but knew not till the season ; and of all those glorious gallops with the hounds—the find, the finish, and the homeward ride.

No more the survey overnight of boots and spotless cords to be worn on the morrow ; the stable items and the early locking ; the seeing how the moon looked for the weather ; the hopes of scent at pattering of the rain against the casement when you were snug in bed ; the rousing up and looking at your watch ere it was time to rise, lest you should sleep too long and miss the hounds ; the early calling of the drowsy groom, and cautions as to water and to feeding.

And farewells then have also to be said to all those cosy pipes and cosy talks with brother chums who dropped in after hunting, and settled with you for a quiet moon, when you had seen your horse was warm and bedded ; and farewell too recitals of the run, the men you cut down, and the rails you jumped ; and farewell all those jolly hunting dreams, when with the hounds again you did great things, and won the brush—or woke, and so just missed it !

No need would there be, with the morning papers, to turn first thing to see what were the fixtures. “Appointments” first, the world’s news afterwards, no matter what was “on,” or how important. Farewell to all ; for there had come an ending to those bright pleasures with your horse and hounds. The flush of spring was everywhere around, and you must wait the ripening summer’s sun, ere autumn came to tinge the leaves with red, and bring you woodland pleasures once again.

And the “last day” came with the morrow morning. The break that last day is was plainly seen ; so large was the meet on that tenth day of April. On every road converging to the common were men on horseback, slowly riding in, in groups of threes and fours, and some with ladies ; and half the country seemed afoot that day ; the rustic element was never stronger.

Men too from other Hunts had kindly joined, to lend a helping hand to one deserving ; a worthy fellow, the landlord of the inn in Cumpston village, where the Hunt horses stabled overnight, when fixtures were afar. Butler for years to “the old Sir Charles,” he had lately had a loss by death and fire ; his wife the one, the other stock and grain,

through tramps, who got into the barn and smoked—at least most thought so.

Sir Charles, the Master, therefore took some trouble, and fixed with the hunting men about a dinner, to take place at the inn “the last day out,” preliminary to the Hunt one in the city; and the table to be laid for eighty people. The fixture at the common near at hand, the meet at ten, and dinner on at six, as giving time, and better for the farmers; arranging, if the hounds bore off too far, Warne was to stop them.

The horses seemed the only difficulty. That was, however, met, as soon as named, by the promise of some clothing from the Kennels, two drags full, with grooms to match; those who had not a second horse that day getting their own grooms brought there in that way, and servants also; that they might help to wait, and save a hitch at dinner, and also save the landlord some expense.

With the farmers round there, the alehouses and inn, the rectory stables, and the Union stalls, that stabled thirty, they made up room for ninety; ten horses more than those that they expected, and all was “cut and dried” for what they wanted—gruel and hay-tea, hay and corn, and bedding. So all bid fair that, while they “did” themselves, their horses also would not fare amiss.

Sir Charles gave help too as to provender; some lamb and leverets, and Severn salmon, and good dessert, and some old choice cigars; leaving but wines, which he himself selected—and maybe paid for—and joints and minor things to be provided, and those were clubbed for, amongst the farmers who lived round about there. Sir Charles to take the chair; with the Rector on his right, the old Squire on his left, and his cousin “vice.”

So that all promised well; and it made them hope that everything would pass off pleasantly, and benefit the landlord of the Lion, who well deserved it.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN LUCK FOR ONCE—A BRACE FOR THE FINISH.

"THIS is something like a meet," said Sir Charles, as the Huntsman came up and touched his cap to him; "but I fear it is far too large for much sport. You must see if you can find that old dog-fox at home, and force the pace, Warne, so as to weed them out a bit, and give the hounds a chance. As it is the last day, it will be a pity if they mob them."

"That they are sure to do, Sir Charles," said Will, who hated a crowd; "but we'll do our best," said he.

"Well, put the hounds in then," said Sir Charles; "it is after ten; and get away with as little noise as you can. If you draw 'blank,' dip for the vale at once, Warne; they will see us all the same without the hindrance."

"All right, Sir Charles, I'll see to it," said Will.

So trotting over the common to the slope, he put the hounds in where the brush was thick; and before half the gossipers were in the saddle, a fox jumped up, and it was the old dog-fox they wanted; and he slipped into the valley down below, with only half a score men with the hounds—Sir Charles and Archer, Stevens on his gray, Dick Hunt and Charlie Burton and Ned Warden, the parson and three farmers; the rest of that large field were "struck," and gaping. They could not understand it; having made their minds up that, until the woods were reached, they would not find.

A sixteen-minutes' race and then a check; the field still "nowhere;" almost all thrown out, for the run was so quick and the start was so good.

Before one-half of them were up, however, the fox was viewed. He had dropped into a ditch, and there remained, until Burton, who had jumped the hedge, to beat up the side of it on the mere chance that the fox might be lying there, thonged him up, and "Tally O'd" him. The hounds were on at once, but "Charles" was fleet, and he widened distance every yard he went, straight up the valley over the water meadows; which being crossed by rails and stiffish fences, that were awkward and double-

ditched ones, and the hounds on hard, falls were soon plentiful, and horses loose.

The pack at length, after running for some time close to the water, dashed in the river, and swimming over it, they checked upon the grass.

"The fox is still on your side, gentlemen," cried some old farmer, as a lot of them galloped up, and looked to see how they could best get over to the hounds. "I saw him," said the farmer, "swim up yonder just underneath the withies; and then he crept out up the bank again, by that old stump."

And as he spoke a "Tally O!" up hill brought Will's horn out, and every hound recrossed; when against the wishes of the men then up, who said it certainly must be "a fresh one," they pounded on, or tumbled at the fences; Sir Charles himself being one who came to grief.

For the next two miles or more the hounds went well; along the wood-banks and through the plantations and the spinnies, the fox evidently making for the big covers on the hills; but being headed by the foot-people, he dipped for the valley again, and faced the river a second time; the hounds running him well, and dashing into it after him with a splash that looked like business; but before they had cleared the pasture beyond it, they checked again.

So as soon as he could, as the stream was swift, Will, with the few who were up, got round over a cattle-bridge that was a little way up the river, and then cast round; but not picking it up there, he tried them by the water, as the fox had tricked them; and then Rambler hit it off along the rushes; and with noses down, they kept it to a tree, an old and rotten stub that lay across there, dropped from the hollowed bank across the water; and bridging the stream within a yard or so, the end boughs lying in a bed of rushes.

There Rambler stopped; and it was then soon evident that the old dog-fox had once more tried his tactics by running over the tree and jumping off it. So Will encouraged him with "Hoick there, hoick; have at him, Rambler!" and he went across it. Led by the old hound, the rest were quickly over, most of them swimming; and although the fox had not half "wet his boots," they owned it instantly.

With noses down, the hounds most luckily turned up the side, and so were met with at the cattle-bridge. "Blame his old carcass, but my hounds shall have him," said Will, as savagely he faced some rails, and landing right, cheered the hounds on and capped them up the meadows, with "Forrard, good hounds! hoick forrard for a kill!"

Dashing up the bank with them, he jumped the hedge into a thicket, and without a breather, and without a check, he took the fields beyond it at a gallop, and raced for very life; the hounds all mute, and running well together—the scent a blazer—the pace puzzling all but the best-mounted ones, for there was a big brook to cross, stiff rails to be negotiated, and a bog for trap.

Holding to the line splendidly, and with Will and the few who were up well with them, the hounds kept on up the banks, and reached the woods the fox first made for; and as they raced through them as though they were as open as grass-land—the scent was that keen—Will, who was on the white horse, dropped into a ride, and tearing along it, standing in his stirrups, crashed through the brushwood at the end of it; then steadying his horse for a moment, touched the saddle, and sent the sticks flying; as the last hound jumped on to the soft green turf upon the hill; followed by Stevens, who had stuck to him, and, well-horsed, kept a good place all throughout; Archer behind him, and Dick Hunt at hand, along with Burton; a lot twig-cracking, and the rest on turf—still by the river-side, through falls and fences.

And as the hounds reached the brow of the hill, they viewed the fox, trying with a trailing brush to gain the quarry, where they had lost him but a month ago. With a wild screech from Will, that made the rocks round ring again, as he slanted down the slope to them, they threw themselves after him; and just as Charlie Burton cleared the wood, he saw below him the old dog-fox rolled over; down at the bottom of the lime-kiln bank, not fifty yards from the entrance to the quarry, which had he reached, they no doubt would have lost him.

As the "Who-whoop!" rang out, and those who were up rode down the steep slope to where the hounds were baying, the quarrymen, a half-stripped brawny lot, appeared upon the ledges with their picks, and helped the picturesque of such a grouping.

This was the scene, as told by Archer to his chum, old Johnson : Will in his scarlet by his old white horse, holding the fox above him on a mound ; and down beneath him all the mottled pack. Horses about, their riders standing near them, lighting the gray-green of the high background, where were the Whips beside some panting hounds, which there were lapping at a little rill. The stone-tint of the quarry forced by shadows, that fell in neutral tones and showed the depth. White slabs and deep red ruts, a team unhooked, crushed ferns, a wagon, and some purple thorns. Above, grassed furze-banks, with some limestone croppings, and wheeling wood-pigeons the noise had roused. High up, a copse, a russet-bank, and firs, a broken sky-line, one white cloud and blue. Below, a wedge-shaped gully, that split the hills, crossed by a level length of distant country, where was a puff of slowly rising smoke.

"Not a bad picture for the last day out," said Archer. "First-rate," said Johnson.

The brush Will Stevens had ; the forepad, Archer ; and there was a scramble for the relics with the rest.

Sir Charles then gave the order to move on, and bear for Cumpton. So pushing through the gully to the open, they drew the dingle, but they drew it "blank." Then moving up the hill, they tried the gorse. A fox had been there ; but he had left too long for hounds with such a scent to pick him up ; so Will went on, and cantered to a farm that was beyond there ; meaning to try them at a rough pool-tail, where were some likely tussocks and big reeds.

And as they neared it, wild ducks rose and flew. "I think," said he, "my lord's at home to-day ; he winds the hounds, and so is on the move, by those ducks going ;" and as he spoke they heard some magpies scold, and jays flew by them. "If, gentlemen," said Will, "you'll range yourselves, and not stir till he's off, we'll bolt him out for Cumpton, if he's here, and save you p'raps a long ride back to dinner."—He chose his own line, though, and nicked them nicely, for they had twelve miles at least to ride when they left off.

With that he took the hounds up to the reeds, and after feathering, a lot dashed in ; when black-tipped bulrushes, that swayed about, soon showed those in were briskly on.

the move; the splash of water and the swirl of reeds sounding like "something there."

A jumping hound or two, a cry, a whimper; a few deep bays, and, with hounds out, a crash; a shout of "Gone away!" and off they were—off with a likely looking one—but not for Cumpton; his nose well pointed, and his brush straight out; with hounds on such good terms, he could not linger.

Will, getting bogged, got balked a bit at starting; and blocked amongst the rest, began to growl. "Now, gentlemen," said he, "get on; get on there, will you? or just make way for me to reach my hounds. You'll find," said he, "soft dropping, if you'll have it. Your last chance, gentlemen, for falls this season."

But letting him go first, he jumped the pleacher; just knuckled as he dropped, and then went on, leaving the ruck to crane at it, or fall. Some did the one and farked it, some did the other, but most of them were quickly in the open; and then remembering, as they did with sorrow, that was the "last day" with the hounds that season, they rode as if each one there went for falls; "last day performances" being much indulged in—to Will's disgust at such wild random riding.

"Now, blame it, gentlemen," he cried, "now do be steady; you'll maim my hounds else, if we have a check. Give 'em a chance for once; don't override 'em; for a brace we must have for a good wind up."

But the majority were more for larking—a little steeplechase business—than for sport; and it needed sundry exhortations, and loud and long ones, from Will, to keep them anything like in order; for there were some rackety fellows out that day, break-neck riders, who, when it took them that way, would select for choice impracticable places, on the mere chance of landing themselves and pounding their companions; and there had been already a good deal of timber cracking, and Will was getting tired of it; as the random ones having had a fair start, they were on better terms with his hounds now than they were in the first run, and so they were much more in his way, and a greater hindrance to the hounds. But he had to cry "Blame it!" a good many times before they would give any heed to him. They liked a frolic, and they meant to have one.

A few falls, however, and increased pace—for the scent improved as they got free of the ploughed lands—cleared the hounds from the ruck of them; and settling down with a few good men, who rode as hard as any of them, but rode with judgment, Will got away with the hounds, and kept them well in hand, and clear of all; and well indeed they went; so well, that had not the fox been a game one, they must have run into him, and that speedily.

Still the pace held, over many a mile of ground, and through the big woods lying on the hills. Leaving the woods, they got on open heaths, that would have led them then too far away, when, as Sir Charles told Warne to stop the hounds, the fox dipped down—the wind was in his teeth. Sinking the wind, he ran along the bottom, then turning, bore for Cumpton; so all went on.

But the pace to which they forced him took the steel out of him, and soon he dodged. First hedgerow tricks were tried, and then some rick-yards—for in the flat there were many farms and places—and then some wainhouses, and then outbuildings—kid-piles and fagot-ricks, and sheds and hovels; but it was all of no use, although the wind was behind him; for the hounds were gaining every yard they went, and were still as keen as if the fox were visible.

Being thus forced to straight running, the distance lessened, and he was soon viewed, and he looked a beaten fox all over. So rattling the hounds along, Will made play, hoping to reach him before he made his point—some earths beyond, that Will half feared were open—and to such good effect, that he cut him off from his line of covers, and made him drop down into some little slingity meadows, that ran up to some banky orchards on the slope. These were a stopper; for they had big brush fences, that were railed on each side of them.

But it was “the last time of asking” till the next November; so, while Will and the others hindered at the gates, Charlie Burton, who was on his good mare that day, dropped her into the pastures, and ramming her at the fences in succession, fled the lot of them.

The hounds, gaining on their fox, took him through them; and racing up the turf almost at his brush, they half reached him at the hedge, and snapped, but missed

him. Then, flinging like greyhounds over the orchard fence, they turned him over—on again, and killed—under the apple-trees, with but one up, and that one Burton, who earned the brush he had when Will came up, through the fairest fencing, and for best straight-going.

With that the hunting ended for the season.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HUNT-DINNER AT THE RED LION.

WILL and the Whips then turned off with the hounds for home, and the rest trotted on quietly for Cumpton—a twelve-miles' ride, which, as they had ample time before them, they all made leisurely.

At six they sat down to dinner. It was laid in the large club-room, and it was hot and excellent, and the waiting good; and the room itself was well set off with ferns and evergreens and flowers and mirrors; with hunting trophies here and there between them, the scarlet of the coats giving lots of colour.

And at the top of the room—over the fireplace, and behind the chairman—were the brushes of the day, Stevens's and Burton's; crossed, under a handsome pair of antlers; other brushes and foxes' heads being grouped about amongst the greenery. And on the walls were some hunting pictures, the usual adornments of the club-room; and placed there by a former landlord of the Red Lion, who was a noted sporting character; and who went well while funds lasted.

There was a goodly muster, for they numbered as they sat just eighty-five; and each man was a hunter; ay, even to the Rector, who went well—in pig-skin as in pulpit, liked by all.

"Now," said Sir Charles, as the Rector sat down again when the dinner was over, "what say you, gentlemen, to a stroll out to look at the horses, just while they clear the tables? If we find that they are all right and well-bedded, we can then see that the servants have all they want, and settle down comfortably for the evening."

So they went out to the stables; and coming in again

in half an hour, to open windows and a crackling fire, they all prepared themselves for full enjoyment.

A few loyal toasts having been given by the chairman—Sir Charles Kerrison—he then rose to say a few words to the landholders, the farmers, and the members of the Hunt there present.

Thanking the former as staunch preservers of foxes, and the farmers for their goodwill, he assured them, and the members of the Hunt generally, that he would always endeavour to give to each district a full share of sport during the season. If any portion was left till last, he hoped the gentlemen of that quarter would not think they were overlooked or slighted. They were all equally good in their endeavour to preserve foxes; and the order in which the different portions of the Hunt were taken was simply a matter of convenience, with some slight relation to the nature of the ground to be gone over.

The severe winter had unfortunately hindered them a good deal, that they were unable this season to give an account of quite so many brace as they were last season; still, take it altogether, it had not been a bad one; for they had found good stout foxes and had good runs with them; and the kills “in the open” were even more than in the previous year, though the total number of kills was rather less.

It was a pleasure to him, he said, at all times, to meet the members of the Hunt and the gentlemen of the district. They had always got on well together, and he hoped they should continue to do so. He would do his part, and he hoped they would do theirs; as all that was wanted to keep the machinery in working order was a little oil from time to time from their own cruse; and if the hard riders of the Hunt would only abstain from pressing the hounds, they would find that the way in which they could work up to a fox, and kill him in the open, was second to none in the kingdom.

He had, he continued, noticed with much pleasure the very many fresh faces amongst them during the season; and he hoped, he said, when they met again at the close of the year, that he should see still more. There was one thing, he remarked, that he was especially glad to see, and that was the “young blood” that was coming into “the field;” some worthy scions of well-known worthy sires;

for there was no finer exercise and no better amusement, and—he was sure they would all agree with him—no other sport that was half so conducive to that manly feeling, that hearty good-will, and that frank friendliness, that one so constantly met with in the hunting-field.

He begged to thank the gentlemen of the Hunt generally, and all those who had come out with them, for their extreme cordiality, and their kind co-operation on all occasions. He hoped they should all meet together for many years to come, and he would always do his best to show good sport. He would drink to the health of each of them—"Long life and happiness;" asking them to fill their glasses for "Success to hunting;" and in connection with that toast, he would mention the names of the two gentlemen who had ended the season so worthily—Mr. William Stevens and Mr. Charles Burton, who, on that day, were the holders of the brushes.

"Gentlemen all," said Sir Charles, "your good health. Mr. Stevens and Mr. Burton, success to you.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "upstanding, please—'Success to fox-hunting!' with three times three;" and amidst ringing cheers, and hunting cries, Sir Charles sat down.

Burton, "for self and partner," rose at once, and what he had to say was short and pithy. A few toasts followed, which were also brief; the clink of glasses and fox-hunting cheers blending with laughter, chattering, and chaff, hearty but gentlemanly, and full of fun, till coffee-cups were seen and thin blue smoke, when songs set in, and Tally Os were heard.

The heroes of the day were first called on—Burton and Stevens—who were asked by Sir Charles to sing; Burton to lead, as senior in age. Now Burton had a propensity for scribbling, and as he always "came out" with some songs new to the rest of them at every hunt-dinner—songs with local allusions, or relating to their own doings in the hunting-field—and was therefore an old offender in that line, the mention of his name as the first to sing at once gave rise to considerable applause; the more so, perhaps, as "old Charlie" was a favourite with all of them.

So amidst cries of "Now, then, Charlie, for a fair start, old boy, and something good," Burton led off, and gave the following song—written by himself; as was also the one

that Stevens gave afterwards—set to a swinging tune that suited all of them ; the names he mentioned being those of men well known to each of them, and in the Hunt :

“ Though the last meet is over, we'll yet have a run,
At this meet to-night, in a yarn I have spun ;
There are most of you here, so we'll see how you go ;
Hark ! ‘ Gone away ! ’ Come along, Yoicks ! Tally O !
‘ Hold hard ! ’ cries Sir Charles, as two of them prepare
To go off at score—Dick Rymall and Clare ;
‘ Just wait till they're clear ; then let each do his best ; ’
And soon we go racing along with the rest.
For we care not for falls, as we heed not hard knocks,
So we can but be in at the death of the fox.

Chorus, boys :

The death of the fox, the death of the fox ;
So we can but be in at the death of the fox.

“ See, the scent is breast-high ; how they flash o'er the lane !
And then race up the plough, though 'tis heavy from rain ;
Such their swing o'er the stubbles, their strain up the banks,
That Bolton and Bateman soon drop from the ranks.
John Archer is holding a line of his own,
And Parker has just at some hurdles been thrown ;
While close too are Griffin and Oliver too,
Who do a bush'd fence as old Wilson purls through.
But they care not for falls, as they heed not hard knocks,
So they can but be in at the death of the fox.

More chorus, boys :

The death of the fox, the death of the fox ;
So they can but be in at the death of the fox.

“ They are into the meadows ; by Jove, what a burst !
Heads up and sterns down, and Will Stevens is first.
‘ To lift hounds like these 'twere a shame ! with a holloa,’
Says he, as he skims the brook just like a swallow,
And cries to Will Warren, ‘ Now, go it, my lad ;
If you don't win the brush you may yet get a pad.’
And while Andrews and Collins, and Horton and Nash,
Do it clean, in go Hammond and Gale with a splash !
But they're used now to falls, for they have had some hard knocks,
Since they tried to be in at the death of a fox.

Chorus again, my brave boys :

The death of a fox, the death of a fox ;
We all try to be in at the death of the fox.

“ The fox leaves the meadows, and points for the heath,
But the hounds as they swing have the wind in their teeth ;
So he sinks it, and threading the dingles below,
Straight off for the hills through the big woods we go ;
And while Miller and Dawson, and others besides,
Are pounding with Harris and Bell up the rides,

The Doctor and King, and myself and Ted Beck,
Come up with the rest, as the hounds are at check.
For we care not for falls, as we heed not hard knocks,
If we can but be in at the death of the fox.

More chorus ; wake up, there !

The death of the fox, the death of the fox ;
So we can but be in at the death of the fox.

“ But we soon clear the sheep, and then dip for the dells,
As down the banks tearing come Jackson and Wells ;
Who rabbit-holes missing, catch ant-tumps, and over
They go—without jumping—head-first into clover !
Dick Hunt tops a gate, and Ned Warden the while,
With Palmer, lands right from a hog-back'd old stile ;
As under a pear-tree duck Causer and Blimber,
And Murray and Dacent both drop at some timber.
But they care not for falls, as they heed not hard knocks,
So they can but be in at the death of the fox.

Time ! chorus now on !

The death of the fox, the death of the fox ;
We all strive to be in at the death of the fox.

“ Some miles we still ride, and the falls are not few,
When a ‘holloa !’ proclaims that at last there’s ‘a view.’
Then to Will’s cheery voice the good hounds lengthen out,
And turning him over, ‘Who-whoop !’ is the shout,
As Stevens comes first in, and John Archer second,
And a very fair run by all there it is reckon’d.
Now fill up, my boys, put the glass to your lips,
And drink to ‘Sir Charles—and to Will, and the Whips !’
For they care not for falls, and they heed not hard knocks,
So they can but gain for us the death of the fox.

Very great chorus, boys ; last time of asking :

The death of the fox, the death of the fox ;
So they can but gain for us the death of the fox ;
The Master and Will and the Whips, who’ve hard knocks,
And ourselves, and the hounds, and the jolly old fox !”

As the song was finished, the clamour that followed it made the glasses ring again ; and the “Tally Os” and “Hark forrards” that were then heard must have induced the small boys who were outside to fancy that a fox was in the room, and that a general hunt was going on there in consequence.

In vain Charlie begged off—sing again he should ! But at last he did get off by making Archer his substitute ; but only on promise of “going in again, you know, when he’s got his wind.”

Archer, in consenting, said he thought, as they had had quite enough noise for one while, the kindest thing

he could do would be to give them a quiet one ; which, written by himself, reflected, when they heard it, the sentiments of all present. This was the song :

“ Be kind to all dumb things about you,
 Your horses, your dogs, and your birds ;
 Their attachment you'll ne'er gain without you
 Are gentle in manner and words.
 For dumb though they are, they've reflection—
 You may smile if you please at the phrase—
 And to him who'd refuse them affection,
 I'd deny it the rest of his days.

“ If all felt the same at abuses
 As I feel, when they lead to pain
 In dumb things, sent here for our uses,
 Not a man would be cruel again.
 Oh, be kind to all dumb things about you,
 Your dogs and your horses and birds ;
 You'll ne'er gain their affection without you
 Are both gentle in manner and words.

“ Being dumb, they demand our affection,
 So let each 'gainst unkindness so raise
 His voice, that no one, on reflection,
 Shall be other than kind all his days.
 But don't keep a dumb thing about you,
 Neither horses, nor dogs, nor yet birds,
 Nor aught that is living, without you
 Can be gentle in manner and words.

“ Be gentle and thoughtful, and kind too,
 With feelings and tastes gentle, then
 Your fellows who judge you shall find you
 To be, what is best—'gentle men.'
 For they'll see all the dumb things about you,
 Your horses, your dogs, and your birds,
 Are so cared for, the fear is without you
 They'll miss both kind manner and words.
 Then so train all those who're about you,
 By example, by precept, and words,
 That they'll treat, be they with or without you,
 With kindness, dogs, horses, and birds.”

“ Now, Master Stevens,” said Burton, as the applause subsided, “ your time has come, young fellow ; so wake up there, will you, for the benefit of our pastor and Master here, and all children present. Gentlemen, he looks towards you, and is off ;” and off he went, and this was the way of it :

“ My name's Farmer Lomax ; I hold some hop-grounds,
 And I'm pretty well known to most out with the hounds ;
 Though my hunter is ancient, and a screw is my hack,
 They can still keep a place at the tail o' the pack.

But if hops come down well, why, I'll sink a few pounds,
 And get a good-season'd horse, quick with the hounds ;
 When if scarlet I can't mount, I've got a red vest,
 As shall then show, that's certain, alongside the best.
 For of all this world's blessings, that which is 'A 1'
 Is hunting, fox-hunting ; it beats all, bar none !

" Yes, there is nothing can touch it ; it beats, and to spare,
 Cock-fighting, jack-shooting, tails, rabbit, and hare ;
 So when up our valley the horn sounds, I cry,
 ' Just stop the team, lads, for the hounds are close by !
 Fetch the mare and my saddle, and slacken the gears,
 I'll ride the old horse—how he pricks up his ears !'
 So they hook on the mare, and I hook off on him,
 Just rough as I am, for I can't stay to prim.
 For of all this world's blessings I do think 'A 1'
 Is hunting, that's certain ; it beats all, bar none !

" T'other day a town swell, with some hair on his face,
 Said, ' Aw, who is the fellow ? He seems out of place.'
 Says I, ' Who am I, my fine fellow ? Why, zounds,
 I'm old Farmer Lomax, as follows the hounds !'
 This morn, as I started, our dairy-girl howls,
 ' That fox has again, pleas'm, been at them fowls !'
 Which riled my good woman ; on which I said then,
 ' Oh, I hate such a fuss 'bout a wretched old hen !
 For of all this world's blessings, that which is "A 1,"
 And beats all, Maria, is hunting, bar none !'

" When the weather's so wet we can't get on the grounds,
 I light my long clay, and I think o' the hounds ;
 The runs I have had, and, with money at call,
 The days when to hunters 'twas 'open house, all ;'
 Till I startle the missis, who fancies I'm 'gone,'
 By singing out 'Forrard ! good hounds, forrard on !'
 But of all those fine friends, only two of the pack
 Are left to me now—that's my hunter and hack.
 The first was a clipper, the other 'A 1,'
 As, out hunting, could then, my boys, beat all, bar none !

" Sir Charles he knows me ; and a lot too besides,
 And they nod when we're hanging about in the rides ;
 And they say, when we find, 'What of old Lomax now ?
 Just fancy that horse, had up straight from the plough !'
 But a drop o' good blood goes a very long way,
 And when bone's with the blood, why, they're certain to 'stay.'
 We are sixteen and sixty-eight, hearty and hale,
 And can still stand a long day, and do a top-rail ;
 And as long as I live, I shall think that 'A 1'
 Is hunting, fox-hunting ; it beats all, bar none !"

As Stevens finished his song, the concluding lines started a chorus, which seemed as if it would never come to an end. A little more speechifying, short and pithy, for breathing time, and then, as the claret was put upon the table, on went the songs again ; this time Warden,

called on by Stevens, who gave them the following song—which was also one of Burton's:

“As hunting's the topic, my song shall explain
How it lost me dear Nelly, then gain'd her again.
Her hair curl'd all over, her figure was fine,
And her lips—well, that's nobody's business but mine.
We'd courted and kiss'd, that of course, for you know
A girl looks for kisses when she has a beau;
And in fact we'd agreed, as 'twas right with the mother,
That as soon as we could we would have one another.

‘Tally O! Tally O!

Hark forrard! Yo ho, boys, we're right! Tally O!’

“So I spoke to her father, a farmer, who caught
Me up with ‘Ah, yes, it is just as I thought;
But you won't do to enter our small familiee,
Till better 'cross country you go, don't you see?
You shirk'd that big brook t'other day with the hounds,
Did gaps and low places, and sneak'd o'er the grounds.
If you want to please me, you must much straighter go;
Till then my consent you'll not have, don't you know?’

‘Tally O! Tally O!

Hold hard! but that's awkward. A check, boys; so ho!’

“I tried to persuade him 'twere hard we should wait,
Because I'd be sure very soon to go straight.
‘Now it's no use that you to the subject return,’
Said he, ‘for I see you have yet much to learn;
And as all our connection have good hands and seat,
With a man who can't ride, why, I don't mean to treat.
Let the season pass over; I'll watch how you go;
If well, and you've pluck, you shall have her, you know.’

‘Tally O! Tally O!

Have a care, boys! we'll pick up the scent as we go.’

“‘Come, there is my hand on't! Now, don't say a word;
Till the end of the season you will not be heard.
In five months, remember, from now, your task ends,
And till then you and Nell and ourselves can be friends.’
So the next time the hounds met, I went it like mad,
And some precious hard tumbles be sure that I had!
But I kept on each day till I didn't care—that!
If I fell on my feet, or I fell on my hat.

‘Tally O! Tally O,

Yoicks! gone away! ride, boys—good hounds! Tally O!’

“For my bones they were hard, and my hide was not thin,
I was riding, d'ye see, my dear Nelly to win.
And win her I did, for he own'd he'd no reason
To refuse me her hand, at the end of the season.
So not long after that, as a brush and some pads
I could show, we got married—and now have two lads,
Who ‘ride a cock-horse’ ev'ry day on my knees,
And bother my life out for ‘pretty gee-gees.’

‘Tally O! Tally O!

Hark! holloa! A view, boys! Yoicks, yoicks! Tally O!’

“ If the young dogs should live, I can see by their prate,
When able to ride, they'll be sure to go straight ;
For already they're fond of both horses and hounds,
And they shout ' Tally O ! ' as they trot round the grounds ;
Till their mother says, ' Will, do pray quiet those boys ;
They get so excited, 'tis dreadful the noise ! '
But I whisper to her, who's been loving and true,
' My darling, 'twas hunting, you know, that won you.'
So I cry, as she says, ' But you shouldn't do so,'
' Hark forrard, you lads ! Gone away ! Tally O ! ' ”

And so the fun went on, with songs and chatter, each song being followed by what seemed now to be the recognised chorus for all, “ Hark forrard, you lads ! Gone away ! Tally O ! ”

At ten o'clock Sir Charles left, with his cousin and the Rector ; and so “ the Squire ” was voted to the chair—Squire Hargraves ; and as a natural result, as he was resident in the locality, the example of early rising set by the Master was at once ignored ; and a general settling down for the evening took place ; because, as they observed, their horses were all right, and getting on with their night's rest ; and so long as they had access to the Rectory and the Union stables, and the farmers remained with them, the best thing they could do was to enjoy themselves while they had the chance of it. Many of them might not meet again for months, and the later they stayed the more the moon would be up.

But though all were merry, no one stayed “ too ” late ; and each one there enjoyed the last day of the season, and the dinner, and all the talk there that they had together on hunting incidents and country scenes.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A BLUSHING BRIDE—ROSE BRANDON.

A FORTNIGHT after the Hunt-dinner at Cumpton, and on the evening preceding the usual one in the city, John Archer rode over to the copse farm at Hazelwood ; to have a talk with the Brandons, and to arrange a few matters with Rose, relative to a proposed picnic party to the Quarry Farm in June, as soon as he and Johnson had returned from their sketching tour, and the ladies from Bristol had arrived at the Rosary.

"I am glad you are pleased with the place, Rose," said Archer, as Nellie settled on his knees, and he put his arm round her. "I think in time it may be made very pretty; but it has for so long been scandalously neglected, that it will really take some time to pull it into shape again. Do you like the front of it?" said he.

"Very much, thank you," said Rose. "Harry drove me up there yesterday, as he wanted me to see to some things for him. He enters, as you know, on Thursday."

"Just six days before yourself," said Archer.

"Well, I hope so," replied Rose; "as we have fixed May-day for the wedding, and we shall be three days out. I am sure we are both greatly obliged to you, Mr. John, for all your kindness, and the trouble you have had for us."

"A pleasure to me, Rose," said Archer. "I only want to see you both comfortably settled; because I know, with a fair start, you will do well; and we are all of us interested in your welfare, and in anything, indeed, that will give pleasure to your father and mother, who, as you know, Rose, are much respected. Mr. Harrison's family too is one that has never had a word said against it; and I don't think, Rose, you could have made a better choice than you have done. I like him very much from what I have seen of him; and he is evidently a good farmer, and knows what he is about; and the doctor, Clifton, who, as you are aware, lives near him, tells me he has always had the name of a steady, sober, well-conducted young fellow."

"So he is," said Rose, "or I would not have had him. We have known each other from children, and we were playfellows together when I was little older than Nellie there."

"You will find," said Archer, "those honeysuckles and things that are on each side of the court in the front will soon tangle up; and now that I have had the roses properly nailed, I think by June the front will be covered with them, and also the gateway. I had that arch put up over it because I thought you would like it. It gives such a nice peep of the house through it as you land from the river. The road up to it, as you see, I have had made hard and good, and have margined the turf in the front of it. The landing-place, when my men have finished it, will be better, and handier and cleaner for the ladies; for

I hope during the summer you will have a good many there to see you."

"You are very kind, I am sure," said Rose.

"How do you like the back?" said Archer.

"It could not be better," said Rose; "it is beautiful!"

"It is pretty, certainly," replied Archer; "but when first we set about it, I had little hopes of making much of it. But what with the fine old trees there, and the shrubs and the flowers I sent over, we have at last got it into shape a bit. I thought it better to let the gardener lay it out as he has, because what was wanted was to keep it thoroughly rural, with just enough flowers about it to give colour. To have had anything of the 'tea-garden' style there would have spoiled it. Besides, the company you will have there will be chiefly gipsy parties of ladies and gentlemen, and any artists and fishermen who have permission from me.

"I think," said Archer, "when we make it known amongst our friends, that you will find, Rose, the little trouble to yourself of keeping the long room and two or three of the spare bedrooms in order will in time well repay you. There are many of my friends who will be delighted to have a few days' sketching in the wood and about there, and some fishing in the river. I have told Harrison," said he, "what I want done in the wood—a few paths cleared, and seats placed here and there—and he will see to it for me. How will the new hen-pens do? I have had them made a good size, because I think poultry will pay you."

"They are very nice, thank you," said Rose, "and will do famously."

"Now, if we can make up a party," said Archer, "I think it will be about the first week in June, weather permitting."

"Yes," said Rose; "and how many will there be, do you think?"

"Well we have two-and-twenty names at present," he replied; "and if they all stick true, I think that will be quite as many of us as you can manage at first. Let me see," said Archer; "we have paired them off, Kate and I, as well as we knew how. First there is Clifton the doctor, he and his wife and his brother; then Johnson, Jessie, Jane, and Mrs. Clare; then Charlie, Mrs. Burton, and

Florence ; and Harry Wells, who will be there on a visit then ; the Honeybrook people—Andrews and his sister, and Oliver and his sister ; and Raymond Warden, and ourselves—that is, Mrs. Best, Miss Clifford, Kate, Ted, and myself—just ‘two elevens,’ as the cricketers say ; and when they get into the wood, I think ‘natural affinity’ will assert itself, and they will pair off comfortably.”

“To think of you being so thoughtful, Mr. John,” said Rose, laughing. “I am sure they ought to be much obliged to you.”

“Ah,” said Archer, “you and I, Rose, have been through it ; so we can sympathise with others. Now about the arrangements,” said he. In this part of the country we arrange our picnics in this way. The ladies find the eatables and the gentlemen the drinkables ; and the youngest bachelor of the party sees to the salt, the corkscrew, the cutlery, and the crockery, and, of course, the glasses ; the only precaution necessary being an agreement between the ladies as to what each one of them shall bring, so as to insure a sufficient variety of eatables, and avoid what took place at one picnic I know of—the bringing of two pigeon-pies apiece by every one there, each one hitting on it as an original idea, and that it would be ‘so nice !’ However, they may have done worse than that,” said Archer.

“They may, indeed,” said Rose, laughing, “and a great deal worse too.”

“Well,” continued Archer, “I find all the fruit and dessert, and, with Johnson, the wines. Just a little champagne for the ladies, to set their tongues going, and some claret for those who like ‘claret-cup.’ I must tell you all about that, Rose,” said he, “when the time comes ; and the Burton ale part of the business the gentlemen see to.”

“Now, I think, Rose, that we cannot do better than dine in the wood, if fine ; and, if wet, in the long room ; and where we were thinking of is in that green dell at the bottom of the forty steps, where they come down from the orchards to the spring, as it is very pretty there, level for the cloth, and the brook is deep enough to put the claret in.

“Then in the afternoon—in the morning those who liked could go love-making in the wood—I thought

there could be boating, croquet, and rambling. I shall have the grass mown, and the ground rolled, where it is level in the little orchard. Then tea; with a gipsy-fire, cross-sticks and kettle, in the quarry; as just then, when all those wild-roses that hang down there are in blossom, it will be pretty.

"After tea, we propose a dance on the lawn, if dry, and in the room if wet; and to have a harp, cornet, and fiddle, just to keep them up to it. Home by moonlight; and that," said Archer, "will give the afflicted ones another chance—because of the glow-worms and the nightingales that will then be in full force there—of a final ramble before we break up."

"Well, you are thoughtful!" said Rose.

And so that matter was settled; and then other matters were talked over, and Nellie was loved; and then he went and sat with the old people, and stayed there till Mr. Harrison came, when affairs at the farm were discussed, and arrangements conducive to the happiness of all present entered into.

And the next day was the Hunt-dinner in the city, which passed off quite as pleasantly as did the preliminary one at Cumption; Charlie Burton being as usual in full force, and with a fresh budget of good songs for the company.

At length came the happy day for Rose—May-day; and the village was astir betimes.

With the first note of the cuckoo all the grown girls there, whose cheeks, however, were far too rosy to need it, were off for the "May dew" in the meadows; and back in good time for the garlands. The men were amongst the hawthorn boughs plucking the blossomed ones, and the women were busy with their little flags and streamers, and with their calico words of welcome; and the young toddlers in the village were about, struggling under the weight of evergreens, or being tripped up by the sprays of them. "The instruments" were tuning up, and rehearsing for a good burst when it was over; and their respective wives, Betsy Morris, Jemima Mason, Priscilla Perkins, and Jane Jill, were up at the church, Hill Combe, arranging the garlands at the gateway, and interlacing them across from there to the church-door.

And the big elm at the top of the village, where there

were going to be races in the evening, had a flag on it; and at the smith's shop was another, the smith's son being "the viol;" and a handsome garland was over the road from the wheelwright's, as he was the clerk.

But the Peyton Arms people cut them all out, though there was not one of the old timbered houses there where they did not do their share—for their flag had "a beautiful picture on it." It was a new one for the Odd Fellows' Club that was held there, and it was now used for the first time; and there was such a quantity of hawthorns and evergreens and flowers and ribbons about there, and over the road and back again, twisting and twining all about there, that, as the old folks said, it looked "like a bower!" All at Hill Combe and Hazelwood felt they could not do too much for "Miss Rose," who was so liked by all around there.

At the Hall too they were very busy; for the old Squire had made Rose promise they would come there from the church to breakfast, and he would only invite those she knew; which included the people from the Rosary, the Grange, and Boscabel; and further than that—as a mark of respect to her and her family—he said they must allow him to send his own carriage for her, and let him also send them in it to the station afterwards, when they left for their three days' little trip to Malvern; that being all the time Mr. Harrison could then manage to be away, or he would have taken her to London—a place Rose, like most country girls, had never been to. A trip there was, however, promised her for some future day.

And by breakfast time on this fine May morning—"happy the bride the sun shines on," said the old women—the village presented quite a gay appearance. The road to the station was through the village, so they hung their best out; and as the time drew near for the wedding party to arrive, few villages could have looked prettier or more rural and country-like; for they all had worked with a will, each anxious to do his best for them. And if there were any people who remained in the village that morning, it could only have been those who were too ill or too old to get to the church; but they could not have been many, as the crowd there was so great, and almost all the houses were locked up.

And as all the young girls about there came streaming

up the meadows, to go over the brook and up the stone steps alongside the wilderness to the churchyard, or helped the old people up the avenue, Florence and her uncle, and Mrs. Barrow and the servants, with the visitors who had come there, were preparing to set out; while down at the Lodge, Carter and his wife and the gardener were busy giving the last touches to the decorations.

At length, after every sound had been thought to be the sound of carriages—the Squire's and two from the inn—there was an unmistakable “trot-trot” heard on the road, and the scout's announcement—about the twentieth—was this time credited, and the carriages turned in at the Lodge, and came up the avenue.

And as the wedding party entered the church, and proceeded to the altar, all eyes were turned to them, and every one said how well they looked—Rose in a dove-coloured silk, white lace shawl, and white-lace bonnet, with jessamine and orange-blossoms; and her three bridesmaids, Miss Harrison, and Miss and Miss Mary Redman, her cousins, in white tarletan and rose-coloured sashes, white opera mantles, with rose-coloured hoods and lining, and tiny white tulle bonnets, with inside border of roses, and fitting to the head, as they were then worn. The elderly friends who were present had shawls and mantles, and silk and satin dresses; and Miss Nellie, who had arrived at the important age of four years that morning, was, as it was her birthday, allowed to be perched up in the Squire's pew by the side of Florence, with strict injunctions that she was to make no exclamation or ask any questions until it was all over; and a little love she looked, with her sunny curls on her white dress, and her rose-coloured bows and flowers; and considering that the whole arrangement was a puzzle to her, she was very good indeed.

As the instruments “put their strength into it,” according to agreement, as the wedding party left the altar, and the bells in the old tower clanged lustily, and shook the flag on it, those who were outside knew that the pretty Rose Brandon had become Rose Harrison; and the reception that she met with as they left the church, and walked to the Hall that adjoined it, was such as to make Rose a very “blush rose.” Never were congratulations more hearty at any wedding; and if the eyes of Rose

dimmed a little as she went along, it was not to be wondered at.

The breakfast was admirably arranged; and as those who were there were personally known to her, Rose was soon at her ease, and all passed off pleasantly.

And when at last the time came for them to start for the station—ten miles from there—Nellie cried because Rose cried, and Rose cried because her mother cried; but they were every one very happy for all that; and amidst a shower of old shoes and hearty “good-byes,” Rose and her husband left the Hall in the Squire’s carriage, and amidst the cheers of the people all down the avenue and up the village, they were soon on their way to Malvern.

The wedding presents were useful and numerous; from the school-children, the cottagers, the farmers, and the ladies and gentlemen who knew her; and in addition to the presents she received from those at the Hall, there was one of a strong, useful, handsome pony, from the Squire; so that, as he said, “You shall be able, Rose, to ride over and see us at any time.”

“She is a good girl, Mrs. Brandon,” said the Squire, “and we are sorry to lose her.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ON A BRIGHT MAY MORNING EARLY—THE WALK BY THE RIVER.

A FEW days after the marriage of Rose Brandon, Johnson had a letter from Bristol. It was from his aunt, Mrs. Clare, agreeing to his proposal of a three-weeks’ residence at the Rosary of herself and his cousin, Archer’s ladylove. The arrangements for their marriage—Johnson and Archer—“at the same church and at the same time,” were therefore concluded; and the end of June was fixed by the ladies, Jane Clare and Kate Archer, for the weddings.

So that all being now so far settled, it became evident to the gentlemen that if they were to have a last bachelor ramble together, as proposed by Johnson, they must soon see about it; as with the arrival of Mrs. and Miss Clare on the first of the month at the Rosary, and the coming of Miss Archer’s friend, Mrs. Best, with her niece, Miss Clifford, soon after then, to the Grange, they could not

well prolong their sketching expedition beyond the end of the present month, May; therefore, if they were to be "three weeks away," they must start at once.

Accordingly arrangements were made. Johnson had a day at the Grange, and Archer left with him on the following evening for the Rosary, as it was handier for them to start from there on the next morning than from the Grange; and promises were given that their next Sunday and the Sunday after should be spent at Grantly, and that the third Sunday they would be back home again.

Their idea was to go up by the river to Shipley, and to stay a week there; and then to have another week at Newland, a small hamlet higher up the valley; so as to get some of the best bits of the river scenery; and then to turn homewards over the hills and through the woods; settling down each night as chance enabled them, or farmhouse, cottage, or road-side inn offered. All they needed was fair weather; not too bright or too dry, or they would miss "effects;" but anything, in fact, short of a hindering downpour for days together; and as the time of the year was favourable, they looked forward, Johnson especially, to being out each day, and bringing a lot of sketches back home with them. Johnson cared more for sketching, Archer for observation; but both talked of work, and one meant it; and the morning of the morrow, Monday, the 8th of May, was fixed for their starting.

"Well, then, that settles it, John," said Johnson. "We can have a rest at Wilmington, take the Fall on our way, and get to Shipley, to the old inn, by five or six o'clock to dinner. So now let us be off, old fellow, or I know where one of us will be at seven o'clock to-morrow—not by the river-side for Shipley Glen!"

"All right, old man; 'if you're waking, call me early'—call me early, brother chum. At six I am with you," said Archer.

"For at seven we start," said Johnson; "for, remember, it is twelve miles even by the river; and if I am to get the Fall, we must be there before the sun is too high. I think when you see it, John, that you will say it is worth painting, for it lies in a wooded glen or gully, and has good surroundings; so good, indeed, that a bit of blue sky and a slanting light is all that it wants to make a perfect

picture; and I think we shall be pretty sure to get the blue. The night, at all events, looks well," said Johnson, as he went to the window, "and like fine weather. Ah, there goes another," said he, "yonder, past the lawn; that's three I have seen—there, four, by the poplars. 'When bats are out,' they say, 'warm weather's near.'"

"Then you mean to make a picture of the Fall?" said Archer.

"If it will do," said Johnson; "though I have not seen it for, I should think, two years, and then it was just flood-time; so there may not now be such a flush of water. I want a waterfall, you see, to fill an upright, to hang between those oblong valley views that Peters bought—a small commission that will pay expenses; and as the Shipley one," said he, "is on our way, we will have a look at it, as it might do. So seven at latest, John, for slanting light; the best by far to my mind for effect; the top just lit where it comes next the sky, with lights upon the bank on ferns and leaves, and all below in shadow; or in an atmosphere of misty blue."

"And how far is it from there to the Ford?" said Archer.

"Not far," said Johnson, "about three miles or so; I don't think more. Say we start at seven; well, to Wilmington by river is eight miles—an hour for dawdling, and two for on the road, will make it ten o'clock. A rest and on—I think it is but a mile—ought, I should say, to get us there in time—at eleven or soon after; which would do, as the wooded banks about it are all high, and we should not get a top light much before then."

"Now there I ought," said he, "if we should find it do, to stay some time; so as to get a careful sketch in colour, that I could work from. Say three hours there, and an hour or two besides for further distance, and for a sketch or two, perhaps, upon the road. We shall do it well, you will find, John, in the time, and settle at the inn at six to dinner, after a good wash as a freshener."

"They used to have—I hope they have her still," said Johnson—"a famous cook there, for chops and steaks and other appetisers. Our traps I mean to send up in the dog-cart; and the last week, as we shall then be on the move each night, why, we must knapsack it. So now for bed; it is twelve o'clock or later."

So they turned off, and went upstairs their separate ways to bed.

But Johnson was in bed and fast asleep before John Archer, as early bed was quite a business with him, and sleep when there a rule.

Not so with Archer. A moonlight night had greater charms for him—unless he was tired out—than bed or sleep; that when he reached his room—up an old oaken staircase ribbed with shadows—and came into the breadth of white light there, he put the candle out, and sat some time full in the moonlight in the ivied window, that looked upon the garden and the lawn, and so across the valley to the woods, that lay upon the hills and cut the sky.

And then, forgetting all about the time, and bed and sleep, he set the window open, and lolled there, listening to the nightingales that were in the cowslip meadows by the copse; their notes coming to him with the smell of flowers—jonquils and gilliflowers and Persian lilacs—that lay beneath the window, wet with dew. And as retreating shadows swept the floor, or touched the wall or wainscot of the room, when the tall poplars bent towards the window, the wind that sent the shadows brought the odours of beans and hawthorn hedges that were near; and of the sweetbriers growing by the arbour, where, with Johnson or his “Tennyson” for company, he sat so often; and where some happy moments had been passed with that fair lady who was now at Bristol.

Then, in that wide bay-window, lolling there, he watched the varied hues upon the grass, and noticed how white light brought out the greens, and gray absorbed them; and how some tints were modified, and blacks were purple; when, lost to all things but his pet one, “colour,” clouds crossed the moon, the garden was in shadow; and, as the breeze swept by, a snow-like drift of white plum-petals passed him. He shut the window, and was soon in bed, and dreamt he was with Jane Clare in the Glen, and sitting by her while she sketched the Fall.

The next morning they were up in good time, and they started at seven o'clock for Shipley.

And it was a bright May morning, with a heavy dew about that made the garden smell fresh and sweet as they crossed it, and went by the white wicket in the shrubbery into the paddock, where Johnson gave the donkey a cuffing,

for letting the cob into the orchard ; where, when he was called, he continued to kick up his heels under the gray boughs and the apple blossom, and with no "come hither" about him ; evidently approving of his change of pasture.

And passing between the hawthorn hedges into the bean-field, they entered the copse ; and threading their way through the long grass, and by the hyacinths and anemones, and the few pale primroses that were left there, they dipped under the osiers in the withy bed ; and crossing the brook at the foot-bridge—a brook golden with king-cups—they went over the stile, and along through the daffodils, that were still in blossom, to the gate at the end ; and so into the lane by the chestnut-trees, that were just pushing their white cones through their greenery.

Then, winding round by some sheds and farm buildings, they went down through the fields to the meadows by the river, that were still wet from the heavy dew there ; but beautifully fresh, and bright, and glistening ; the soft morning shadows creeping from the hedges, and the birds singing merrily in the boughs about them ; a thin white mist hanging by the river, and the hills in the distance blue and shadowy. And there as Johnson and John Archer entered them, and stayed to pick some cowslips and cuckoo-flowers, and a bit of purple orchis, to put with the wood-sorrel and the wood-anemones, and the hyacinths that they got in the copse, they saw what a fine sweep of river it was, and how picturesque were the fishing fords ; where the foam-water bubbled under the bushes, and splashed about the stones—stones that were stepping-stones to the fishermen, when the water was low there in the greyling season.

They also noticed, as they came towards the water, that though the wooded hills did not begin their slope for three fields' breadth from there—a meadow, an orchard, and a hop-yard—they could see, far away as it seemed, underneath the banks, and beyond the colour of the blossom in the orchard, the reflection of the lowermost trees and the big elm, upside down, by the old gate at the ride. And in the shallows, close against the reeds, some cows were standing ; some red and white ones, milking cows ; half in the sunlight and by blue water, whisking their tails about, as the gnats played by them over the rushes and the cinnamon-grasses.

The river too, as it bent beyond them, was bordered by willows, that were bushed and tangled, or choked with plants and brambles, which had been left there in their clefts by the floods in the summer, when they came washing through the valley red and angrily; scooping the banks and toppling the trees about, and thus gladdening the hearts of artists for the "break" they made; while those with loosened roots so dipped their boughs, that they touched the boughs opposite; so that, when their leaves blew up as the wind stirred them, they framed the river with an arch of light, that shimmered for a while, and then turned over, and showed its silver reflex in the water, against the shadows—olive-green and purple—of the large dark alders that were growing there.

And where the river curved into the woods, beyond the little orchard and the hop-yard, its darkened surface showed it was in shadow; that would have been unbroken, but for ripples against an old snag sticking in the stream—jagged, white, and angular, and with reaching arms; and a sharp wedge of light, as a moor-hen fluttered with one dropped wing to rushes at the side.

Past this old snag a sandstone church came in, against the woody background and the hills, circled by yews; that where they showed above the light-leaved willows, looked black with age. And near it was a gable-ended farm, some cottages, and some shedding and a barn; and an old dovecot by it, with pigeons that were flying to the woods, and circling round the tower and the trees.

And as Johnson and Archer went on by the river-side, the sun gleamed along the meadows, burnishing the butter-cups, and making more pearly the buds on the hawthorn boughs. And there was colour everywhere, for soft tints were amongst the greenery.

The orchards were rosy with blossom, and the chestnuts were creamy with bloom; the copses were purple with hyacinths, and the commons were golden with gorse, and the air about them was heavy with the scent of it.

And the meadows, as they traversed them, were bright with wild flowers—king-cups and butter-cups, cowslips and orchis, vetches and daisies, cranes-bills and cuckoo-flowers, sweet woodruff and comfrey, and the purple iris and the golden saxifrage were growing thickly by the

water; and the hedges were high and tangled with the wild hop and briony. The tinted stems of the clematis swept the mallow blooms, and the blue violets upon the banks were with the white stitchworts and the strawberry blossoms; and arums were in the hedges.

The oaks were thick with their oak-apples, and the birch had its pendent tassels, and wax-white flowers were on the green hollies. Bees were amongst the broom, and gnats were about the crowfoot; butterflies were flying, and birds were singing; and there was a perfect melody in every thicket; and the sound of child-voices added to the joy of it. The beech and the wild cherry, and the mountain-ash were in blossom; the crab-apple and the plum; and the bloom was blowing from the blackthorn, for its leaves were coming.

Young rooks were in the trees, and young robins were in the bank hollows; and there were nests innumerable—from the starling's in the orchard, and the chaffinch's by the copse, to the yellow-hammer's in the willows by the water. All but the bullfinch had built, and he was building; for Archer found his twigs in a hawthorn bush. Pheasants were crowing, and skylarks were carolling; and the cooing of the doves in the woods compensated for the cuckoo.

The women in the hop-yards were rush-tying, and the men were wheat-hoeing; and the farmers in the fields were busy planting their swedes and their mangolds. The young hares were timorous on the grass-lands, and the young rabbits were venturesome in the hedgerows. And there was a fragrance of clover in the air, and a sweet smell of gillies from cottages; and the green lanes gave an odour of hawthorns, and there was a rich scent of woodbines from hedges.

And the brooks were well fringed by their grasses, and great leaves grew down by the river; and the tall reeds and the rushes, and the flag-sedge and burdock, reflected their greens in the water.

At many of the farmhouses too, that lay by the river, there were purple masses of lilacs, and bright beds of garden flowers; that, with the rose-blush in the orchards, and the white on the chestnuts, and the thickness of green that was at the back of them, set off the old places famously; and some of them looked none the worse for a rookery, for

there was busy life there; nor for a dovecot, for the young pigeons were numerous.

The river also wound about there so very much—now by the road-side, and then by the woods—that the scenery changed with the twist of it; and as Johnson and John Archer went on by the side of it, through pastures and orchards, fields and hop-yards, spinnies and ash-beds, there was such a constant succession of charming colour and of varied form, that when they got to the ivied bridge they left the greensward for the road reluctantly.

And down below the bridge, by the mill, there were some people who were fishing—trying the May-fly—so they had a rest against the parapet and watched them. And they noticed, as they looked at them, how transparent and unshadowed the river was, and how quietly it seemed to glide between the banks, over the pale greens of the hanging trees, and the light leafage of the willows reflected there; until just above the weir, where it was steel-blue, and on the weir quite blue—for it caught the sky there—it changed to a rush that sent the water onwards with a drive, and made it jump from ledge to ledge in round white heaps of foam into the mill-pool under; splashing the bushes with the spray, and twisting the grasses short round with the force of it, as it eddied away in long ovals to the wheel; and then swirled away in bells to the burdock-beds that lay beyond it—there knee-high or more—with broken sunlight playing on the leaves, and with blue showing in the water where they dipped, making white wavelets as they met the current.

And when they had stayed there a while, they turned over the stile by the bridge, for they found it would cut a corner off; and after their experience of green turf, the path there was preferable to the road; and then they went down the stone steps and over the plank into the meadows—daisied ones—that ran up by the river to some orchards, and that then went on again, dotted with cattle to the hop-yards and the fields that were beyond them.

Then, as a light breeze swept across the valley, rippling the river, cloud-shadows crossed it; and the momentary change of sun and shade made fleeting colour that was very beautiful; the water steel-tint where the shadows fell, and white and glistening where the fields were sunny; the blue hills dulling under distant rain.

And as they lingered along, watching the effects, and came to the foot-bridge near the cottages, they got down into the cutting—a wide ditch that went to the river, and took the back-water at flood-time—to pick some butter-burr, that was growing there amongst the leaves and the rushes.

For, except when the river was flooded, the cutting was dry, and half filled with greenery ; so that it served in the summer, when it was blue with forget-me-nots and sprayed with roses, as a trysting-place and a play-place for the children ; who would race the butterflies there, and hide under the bridge, and make the meadows ring with their merry laughter, as they linked themselves together with the long trails of the white-blossomed bindweed, and went trotting about playing at "horses ;" or they would twine their sun-bonnets with roses, or sit there by the hour plaiting rushes.

And getting over the stile, Johnson and Archer crossed the last meadow, and leaving the river-side, came into the lane, where they had a gossip with the old women at the cottages, and saw some children playing about there—rough and rosy ones—shock-headed, but picturesque ; so they booked them mentally for future models, in some excursion when they had time to sketch them. Then turning round by the little green and the pound, they reached the outskirts of the wood—Holly Wood.

The lane there was a very pretty bit of lane scenery, as it was banked with ferns—for their cool dewy habitation there was a very different thing from a dwelling-place on the commons, and so they had fine green leaves when the others had but fronds—and bordered for the length of it with big hollies and hazel-bushes ; and there were lots of tall trees as well, up above them—elm and chestnut, and beech and oak—that shadowed it, and that sent flickering lights across it, as the wind rustled the leaves and moved the boughs about.

And it did not want for flowers either, for the wood pushed them out upon the banks, it was so full of them ; nor for rabbits, as they were always sitting up on end there, or stamping about and showing their white tails ; for they cared as little for the noisy cuckoo as they did for the squirrels and the quice ; and as for the school-children, they were about there too often, birds'-nesting and scrambling, for them to care much about them.

So it was no wonder that, when Archer shouted at them to make them run, they should, first of all, wait to see if there was anything to run for ; and then, unable to make up their minds in a moment, merely go into the ferns a bit, just to be quiet by themselves for a minute or two to think it over.

But they soon decided that it was all nothing ; for when Archer turned round to look, there they were again, sure enough, twisting about after each other, up the banks and over the ruts, like the jolly little rabbits they were. And the wood was full of them, for they were scampering about in all directions, as Johnson and Archer went through it, and got over the ladder-stile at the end by the gorsed gate into the turnpike road, and turned for the brook.

The brook, though, was but a bit of a brook at the best of times ; but as it would come out over the road through some ragged old palings—picturesque in their mossiness, and gray and brown—to go across from one meadow to the other, it was bound to be seen and noticed ; for stepping-stones had to be put there for the foot-people, all up one side, so as to be out of the way of the teams that came through it.

It was a great place for the lads, too, when “the brooks were out,” as they could then manage to get splashed if even they did tuck their trousers up, and that was “fun ;” as was also the tumbling back into it out of the hedges, when they were “scrimmaging” there for blackberries ; and the getting “a leg up” sometimes on to the leader, when the squire’s team came there, jingling along with their bells ; when they would prick him, the young scamps, with a pin, to make him whisk his tail against the next one.

And the brook, shallow as it was, did not look amiss as they came to it ; for a well-grown country girl was on the stepping-stones, holding a can upon her head—“Fine pose,” said Johnson—and sending as she moved a gleam of red light into the water, from her petticoat, which, though it was not visible, was reflected there.

Stepping over the stones after her—half inclined to get the pencils out, and sketch her—they went up the road ; and turning round the corner by a farm-yard, with a thatched crib in the centre—“A Herring-looking bit,”

said Archer—they came upon the entrance to the village—Wilmington—"half-timbered Wilmington," eight miles from home, where was their resting-place—the Anglers' Arms.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DOINGS AT THE CHURCH—MINE AND THINE—THE VILLAGE OF WILMINGTON.

So they were soon at the inn, and snugly seated there, after the landlady had driven the fowls out, and dusted the chairs with her apron; her good man being, as she said, "busy a-brewin', gentlemen." However, he came in before they had finished their lunch; and seeing Archer examining a large carved snuff-box, that he had taken off the mantelpiece, he at once became loquacious.

"Our old parson cut that, sir," said he; "he were a great hand at carvin'. They do say he carved the best part of our pulpit, sir, but I doubt it; for, you see, 'the old gentleman,' sir, is one o' the figures. Oh, you may laugh, sir," said he, "but there's his tail and all complete, and I know him, because I was clerk; and if the master—that's our parson—he ar'n't alive though now, God bless him—had 'a carved him, he'd 'a made him more terrifyin'-like, to keep them school-children in order; as was all the beadle's—he plays the trombone i' the band at our 'feast,' sir, and fine wind he's got, too—all his work to keep 'em quiet, a-nobblin' 'em.

"'Full-stop,' we called him," said he, "because whenever the old parson said, 'Let us pray,' or 'Good Lord deliver us,' or whatever else was set down for him, sir, and stopped to count three at colons, or four at the stops, crack on a youngster's head would come the stick; and that so reg'larly, sir, that by keepin' the stops in that way, he managed to make 'em tolerably attentive-like to the service, and it kept the congregation awake, too.

"Talkin' o' that, sir," said the landlord—"well, thank you, gentlemen," said he, as Archer offered him some perry, "I don't mind if I do have a drop with you; it's my own fruit as made it, and I know what's in it—I

remember," said he, "a kind haction of his, a very kind haction—he'd a good heart he had, sir, though he were a fat man—so fat, indeed, that he were always obligated to be druv to church in a sort o' little wagon, somethin' like them 'wagon nets' as be come up since, but plain and rough-like; they put some steps to it, sir, and he got in behind, while they held it down i' the front, and he settled well forrard for fear o' tiltin' it; for, you see, sir, he were a heavy man, a matter o' three-and-twenty stun, and his puff wer'n't good; but the cob—he were rather carty, sir—were a good un, and up to it, because the pace wer'n't much; call it a walk, sir, and you'd be near it.

"Well, sir," continued he, "as I were a-sayin', one Sunday mornin', just as we'd got through the Litany atween us, and it was his turn to go on, 'Thomas,' says he, in a haudible sort of a whisper, 'go and wake the churchwarden; there's some lads in his mowin' grass. Take my whip, and go with him.' He could see 'em, you see, sir," said the landlord, "as he sat i' the desk, because the church looked over the weir-meadow and the hop-yards; as were very nice, sir, as we could see everybody as went through 'em, or come over the bridge, and watch the pigeons a-flyin' too, sir, while we was attendin' to our duties, as made the time pass like.

"Well, sir," said he, "when he spoke they was up to their necks in it, the young vagabonds; but as soon as they set eyes on us, they was precious soon out of it; but though we run our best, and a good many o' the congregation with us—the best part on 'em, sir—we didn't catch 'em; they was too quick for us. We got their rods, though, and I caught a trout—a big un—with one on 'em when I went a-fishin' after service. The churchwarden he had the t'other, and he caught some too, and a small poike, sir."

"What, on a Sunday!" said Archer.

"Yes, sir," said he. "It were no harm that, sir, because it were out o' the parson's water—the bit as runs by his meadow, sir. It ar'n't anywhere, of course, as I'd fish on a Sunday, nor would then, because being clerk I knowed my duty."

"But did he not say anything to you about it?" said Archer.

"Oh yes, sir," said the landlord; "he said as he were

very much obleeged to me. I took and give it him, sir, as he were a nice fish."

"But about Sunday?" pursued Archer, who had rather strict ideas as regards the due observance of that day.

"Oh ay, sir," said the fellow, "I see where you be. He said, 'You should have given him a swim in a pail, Thomas, and have brought him up in the mornin'; but he's a good fish, and I'll eat him.' And so he were, sir," said he, "a very good fish indeed, sir. He weighed nigh upon four pound, and the spots on him were beautiful. He were just in season, sir.

"Well, sir," he continued, "not content with doin' the man a kindness—that's Mister Gibbins, the churchwarden, sir—hang me, sir, if he didn't go and apologise to him for awakin' on him—only to think o' that, now; catch me o' ever a-doin' it if I gets parson—and said how sorry he were that he were obleeged to wake him. Now, that was somethin' like a man, that was; but, there, I will say that, our parson always knew what were manners, because he'd been brought up proper-like."

"And what did the churchwarden say to that?" asked Johnson, to whom the parson's meaning was apparent.

"Say?" said the fellow. "Oh, he said, 'All right, parson, I'd finished what I were a-dreamin' about, thank you.'"

"Ay," said he, "a very good sort o' man were our parson. Old as he were, couldn't he just give it them Romans? When he did loose out, he'd let 'em have it, I can tell you, sir," said the landlord. "There were a deal o' metal in the old man, for he were a true-blue Tory, and a church-and-king man; we got none o' that sort nowadays, more's the pity, gentlemen. It was king then, you know, sir, though it's queen now—here's 'her immortal memory,' gentlemen," said he, as he emptied his glass; "God bless her Majesty! Well, thank you, sir," said he, as Johnson offered him some more, "I will just have one drop, sir, as I couldn't heel-tap that lot; it wouldn't have been proper, sir, you know, to have drunk it in half a glass; that wouldn't have been loyal anyhow, sir.

"Well, as I was a-sayin', sir," said the fellow—seeing Johnson was getting impatient—"he had used to give it them Romans! Why, sir, to sit under him when he

banged the Bible at 'em—well, sir," said he, "it were a savin' to me in snuff; for what with hittin' the cushion till it jumped again, and the dust he sent on to me, there were plenty a-goin' on to keep one awake, I can tell you, if it were only the keepin' on a-wipin' o' one's glasses—I wears 'em for print, sir, to this day—so as to be on to the hymn in a minute, if he ended suddint, which he used to do sometimes, sir, when he wished to be 'pressive; as much as to say, sir, 'Just you fellows down there turn that over now, will you, while you're a-goin' home through the hop-yards. I've said it, and I mane it!'"

"Yes," said Johnson, who was on the fidget to be off, and looking out of the window to see how high the sun was, "he seems to have been a resolute old gentleman."

"That he were, sir," was the reply. "Our Mary—that's my wife, sir,—her as druv the fowls out just now, confound their carcasses—there's a Poland, sir," said he, "as always brings 'em in, as I shall pot, if he don't mend his manners—she had to stay at home, you see, sir, to mind the babby—that's him, sir, i' the bar, six foot one, as knows the blessed water for miles, and where ev'ry fish is, gentlemen, and as'll be proud to wait on you when you brings your rods; so I prayed for both like."

"Well, sir," he continued, "when I'd come back to dinner, 'Ben,' she'd say—my name's Ben, sir, as well as Thomas; that's Ben Thomas, at least Benjamin in full, sir, as is writ proper on the sign, the Anglers' Arms, sir, as there's a quoit-ground at the back, likewise a alley, and bowers convenient, as I can bring you anythin' you like to order there, sir—'Ben,' says she, 'the Romans have been havin' it, hav'n't they?' 'Why, Polly,' I'd say—I call her Polly," said he, "for short, sir; her name's Mary, as I said, sir,—'whatever can you be a-thinkin' on?' 'Now, Ben,' she'd say, 'it's no use you a-denyin' of it.' I didn't wish to expose him, d'ye see, sir," said he, "because it were only once a month or so as he did let out; but when he did let 'em have it, it were like a horse a-kickin', sir, it were that powerful. 'If you'd been i' the mill,' she'd say, 'the whole mornin', you couldn't ha' got it kinder. If the parson don't make you a present, come Christmas, of a clothes-brush and a comb, he's no man; and I don't care if he knows I says it, there now! Just you go and look at yourself; you're quite a hobject, and worse powdered than any London footman as they pays to be done.'

"So I used to stir at that, sir," said the landlord, "as it were notice like to clane myself a bit, before I had my dinner; but he were a good man, he were, a very good man!"

"But that must have been long ago, when you were clerk," said Johnson. "Why, I have known this house for years, though I have never been in it before, and I have seen your name on the sign for a long time."

"Come Midsummer," was the reply, "a matter o' two and twenty year, sir; for my son there, sir, as I spoke about, were a child in arms when the old man died. They say it were his fat as settled him. We give him a very handsome funeral though, sir," said he, "for we all put on our Sunday-bests, and we did him honour after i' the belfry; leastways, we stopped there till the moon got up, and we had 'cans round'—that's a can a man, sir, and with no heel-taps allowed; and I don't see how we could ha' done him better nor that, sir. But he were worthy o' the honour, he were, quite worthy."

"Ah, poor man," said Archer, "no doubt he would have appreciated it, could he have known of it. Then you gave up being clerk when he died?"

"Well, not all at once, sir," he replied; "that wouldn't ha' looked well of me, because the new parson, you see, sir, always looks to be broke in. But the first weddin' as we had," said he, "he offended my friend the bass viol, as well as behavin' rather badly to the clarionet; two very tidy men, sir, and neighbours. You see, sir," said he, "it were to be a musical weddin', because the bridegroom—that's him as were goin' to be married, sir—were a decent sort o' young man, as were a-drinkin' with us the night before, and were a friend o' the ringers, and were musical hisself, sir, as he played the fiddle; so they said he should have a peal when he come to the church, sir, as well as the one after, when he'd got the business over, rule or no rule. So the other chaps, them as sat behind the Royal Arms, sir, agreed to do their part, and they all said as they'd 'play up well, blowed if they wouldn't!'

"Well, the new parson, sir," continued he, "was agen it, as he said it were out o' all course and reason; but the ringers stood true; so they beat him as it were 'all or none.' You see in them days, sir, most o' the ringers were the farmers' sons, as used to do it for pastime, and as met

most nights i' the belfry for practice, and stood their cans like men; so the parson couldn't have it quite his own way, sir, for fear of a bother about the tithe; as were a good thing, sir, as it kep' him from presumin'—that's the new un, I mean, sir; the old un, as I said, were a True Blue, and a good un!

"So then he turned nasty with the Royal Arms men over 'the time,' and said, when they was rehearsin' what they was goin' to give him, they took it too quick like, as made it anythin' but sacred or proper.

"Well, they didn't like that, sir," said he, "because they'd took a deal o' pains with it, as I knowed on, and in fact quite hoped the squire, who were to be there—the young man were his keeper's son, sir—would give 'em their due, especially as it were to be somethin' out o' the common, sir, and composed o' purpose."

"What was it?" said Archer.

"Well, sir," he replied, "it were a somethin' between the 'Dead March'—in *Saul* and 'Haste to the Weddin',' for that were what they tried to make it, sir—a bit o' a smack o' both, you see, sir—her a sorry o' leavin' her old mother, and him a-urgin' of her to let him take care on her, and to be quick about it—as bein' suitable to the occasion. 'Mixed Feelin's,' the schoolmaster called it, sir; and a very pretty name it were for it, as a equalisin' the thing for the clarionet and the viol, so as they could not say one had the better o' the t'other, and get a-fallin' out and a-fightin' i' the belfry afterwards; and perhaps a-upsettin' the cans, as would ha' made it unpleasant, and ha' led to a-wastin o' good liquor."

"A most important consideration," said Johnson, "certainly."

"Well, sir," continued the landlord, "all that might ha' passed over perhaps; but it so happened that Daffy Jack—he lived up the village, sir, and were a 'natural'—heard them a-talkin' about 'suitable tunes,' and how it were meant to 'play up' as they went to the altar. He used to hang about the belfry a good bit, sir," said he; "they give him the bottoms out o' the cans, to do him good, poor fellow; when—fool as he were, he were awful cute, sir—what should he do, but sly up into the gallery with his fiddle under his coat—he were one o' 'the waits,' sir, at Christmas, so could play a bit; he don't go round though

now, sir, because he's been dead some years—and when the party made a put to go up for the ring, up jumped Jack, with 'Give it him suitable; give it him suitable!' And darn me, gentlemen, if he didn't bost off with 'Froggy would a-wooin' go,' an old tune but a good un, on the fiddle, straight on end, sir, and played it like mad; for though we all run him, we couldn't get it off him, for he were all over the place, and he played it as he run."

"A very nice state of things indeed!" said Archer.

"It were, sir," said the fellow, "and awful savigin'; as it set the womenkind a-roarin' o' laffin', sir, and flustrated the new parson tremenjus; that it were quite a mercy the ring wer'n't put on the man instead o' the woman, as might easily ha' happened in the confusion o' the moment.

"Well, sir, there were a row after that little lot, as you may be sure; and as the parson would have it as I knowed all about it, and that I got it done a purpose, we had words and parted; and I've never been i' the church from that day to this; a matter o' two and twenty year, sir; as I trusts I knows my duty, and don't like to be put upon."

"The irreligious wretch!" said Archer quietly.

"So soon after that, sir," continued the fellow, "my Mary come into a bit o' money by her old aunt a-dyin', as were a good thing for her; and with what we'd scraped together ourselves, we managed to take a little place with a bit o' fruit on it, as turned out lucky. So then I got me a horse and cart, and took to carryin'; two days a week, sir,—Wednesdays and Saturdays; when darn me, gentlemen, if we didn't get another pull, for a aunt o' mine this time went and died, and left me some money—that were a equalisin' it for us, don't you see, sir.

"Well, sir," said he, "we started a stockin' at that, as we were folks o' property; and we put into it all the ha'pence and all the silver too as we could spare; and a bit o' gold into the bargain, if we had it; because old Mr. Mansell, as kep' this house then, were a-drinkin' of hisself to death, and we didn't know from one day to another but what," said he, "he might be better off, and we too; because we'd got the promise o' the house from the landlord, as I carried for, and never charged him no more than I thought he'd stand; so in course he were obleeged to me, sir. The missis as well, sir; I took her

butter and eggs and things, and never so much as had carrier's share, or pickins, out of 'em, sir.

"Ah, sir, depend upon it, as my old copy said, 'Honesty's the best policy.' And so it is, sir," said he, "because they're sure to have you some time or other; and that's where it don't pay. There's Jem Braddon now, i' the next parish, him as carried for Sir Stephen. Well, sir," said he, "they nailed him at last, and got Mr. Holdem, the governor o' the county gaol, to take care of him for a bit, and to mind as he didn't want for exercise; and as he told me, sir, when he come out again, it interfered most abominably with his business, as it made people he carried for that pertickler as he couldn't get half a livin' by it, and he had to give it up in the end; so, as I say, sir," said the fellow, "when it don't pay, why try it? There are a good many rogues though, like Jem, I'm a-thinkin', sir, in this world, as fancies theirselves real honest men."

"So it seems," said Archer significantly. "You have some putchins outside there, I see. Are there many eels," said he, "about here?"

"A good many, sir," said the landlord, "and I'm a-goin' to have some; but them putchins ar'n't mine, sir, I borrowed 'em for a week or two—I got 'em up the river; they belongs to a man up there, Isaac Timmis."

"I see," said Archer; "he lent them to you?"

"No, he didn't, sir," said he; "I took 'em; and the fun of it is he'll be a-lookin' about for 'em everywhere, sir, thinkin' as how some fellow's stole 'em."

"But you will surely put them back again?" said Archer.

"In course I shall, sir, when I've done with 'em," was the reply, "but not afore, sir; you may take your born davy o' that, that's certain. I shall have my share o' fish first though; I wasn't born yesterday or the day afore; no, no!"

"Ah, sir," continued the purblind fellow complacently, "it's a queer world; some people thinks they've a right to anythin', and takes it without sayin' 'With your leave,' or 'By your leave;' and he's one o' that sort, sir. He'd never, I know now, have the manners to call in and have a jug, and say, 'Thomas, you don't mind me a-catchin' a heel or two in the back-water, do you, or down by your

mud-banks i' the river?' No, sir," said he, "he'd catch all he could and keep it dark; and that, you know, sir, ain't neighbourly. Live and let live, say I, sir, and do the right thing upstraight and downstraight, as is honest and aboveboard; then, sir, nobody can't say nothin' agen you, can they now, sir?"

"Not when they act up to what you say, certainly," said Archer; "but it is not every one," said he, "who can properly distinguish between right and wrong."

"Ah, you're right there sir," said the fellow; "that's where it is; but it's all along o' their blessed ignorance, sir. I used to pity many on 'em, sir, when I were clerk."

"Yes," said Archer, "such ignorance needs pity."

"Come along, Archie," cried Johnson impatiently; "we shall have the sun ever so high before we get there. Which is the shortest cut, my man, to the Waterfall?"

"Shipley, sir?" said Thomas. "Oh, straight on up the village, sir, and first turn to the right. You will see the woods before you, and there's a gat in the hedge at the bottom, as'll save you goin' round by the rides. Take the gat, sir, and go straight up the bank through the bushes; and if you meet the keepers, sir, tell 'em I told you, and it'll be all right."

"Thank you," said Johnson; "a very good glass of perry, landlord. We shall be round this way again perhaps some day, and will then give you a look in."

"Always glad to see you, sir," said the fellow, "and point out the fishin' to you; and my son, as I said, sir, gets his livin' by it."

"A 'meum and tuum' individual," said Archer, as they were on the road again.

"Yes," said Johnson, "and oblivious to all but his own superiority. Why did you not wind him up?" said he. "We shall be late, I know. He and that Peyton Arms fellow would do to run in a curriele; two long-winded ones together."

"I think so," said Archer; "but if you attempt to stop such fellows, you only get double allowance. They hinder to hear, and then, with 'Well, as I was a-sayin', sir,' they give it you again from the commencement."

"What a jolly village it is, Johnson! No lack of material for the pencil, is there?" said he.

"No," said Johnson, "there are lots of good bits about."

I have taken several, one time and another, as you know, John. We can make a day here from Shipley if you like, but we must get on now."

The village was certainly picturesque; but it had been so sketched by artists that no good point in it had been left untaken; its component parts having served for many years together to cover canvases for all the exhibitions within reach; and thus the old-fashioned half-timbered houses of Wilmington were as well known, and as readily recognised, by the picture-loving public, as were the Cox-found beauties of Bettwys-y-Coed.

And as they went on up the village, by the black-and-white timbered houses, with their leaded lattices, their weather-stained bulged fronts, and with their porches and their gardens smothered with greenery, and with their old palings and their old orchard trees blossomed over, and their big elms at the back to shadow them, with pot-plants on their sills, and their clean white curtains flapping from the windows, it was no wonder that Archer still found a charm in it. And few could help doing so, for there was always a quaint old-world look about it that satisfied.

There seemed on this morning, too, to be such "a country smell" about it—a smell of cows, and a sweet scent as of new hay—from the withered comfrey that lay about the hedges, thrown there by the children, there was so much of it in the meadows—and a delicious odour of sweetbrier and hawthorn, spring beans and clover. And there was a great humming of bees about the place, and a pleasant murmur of running water, and a flitting of swallows, and a flying of pigeons, and a chuckling of fowls, and a tinkling of gears, as the horses, in for "bating," moved or stamped as they were feeding in the long stables that were by the road, with a "pitching" and a trough in the front of them.

Nor did the feeling of satisfaction lessen as they went on, for the road dipped, and the brook came over it; and the geese and the cows were there, to do as they pleased in it or out of it; and the ducks were in the grass by it, snailing and waddling, for "nobody never" meddled with them in that village.

The pound was open, and the donkeys had gone into it; and the churchyard was open, and the sheep were in it;

and the church, too, was open, as the cleaner had left it—for her “nunccheon,” no doubt, by the broom and the bucket; so they both—Johnson and Archer—entered it, and they looked at the big font and the carvings, and at the stone effigies there, and at the old oaken door that was open-railed in its upper half; the admittance of “the pure fresh air” into the church being thought of more importance in olden days than security from plunder.

And after looking amongst the old gray headstones in the churchyard, that were but barely distinguishable amongst the long grass, and at the old yews that swept them with their trailing branches, and that so nearly touched the ground in their leanings that many of them were propped, and at the old sundial with not a letter upon it, and at the old tower circled by three iron bands for the crack in it that went down into the ivy, they turned into the road again; and taking the first turn to the right, they passed the rusty old stocks and the horse-pond, and the big elm and the blacksmith’s; and then they saw in front of them the common, and beyond it the woods—the woods where was the Waterfall they were in search of.

“Now, then, let’s step out,” said Johnson; and they did so.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WATERFALL IN THE GLEN, AND THE OLD INN AT SHIPLEY.

“WHAT a jolly lot of gipsies, Johnson!” said Archer, as they crossed the common. “There are some fine-looking girls there, too. Look yonder, by that first tent; there’s back-hair for you,” said he, indicating by a nod a tall shapely brunette, who stood there with some others gazing at them, and arranging her long black hair the while, heedless of their presence. “Come and sketch her, old fellow, and I’ll have my fortune told,” said Archer; “I fancy she is very good-looking.”

“Bother the gipsies!” said Johnson; “I have had enough of fortune-telling; we shall see heaps of them too, while we are out. Come along,” said he, “and let the

gipsies alone; you are almost a married man, remember. I am surprised at you. You ought now, you know, to see beauty but in one face."

"Ah, that's right enough," said Archer, "in the abstract, Johnson, but in an artistic sense, you know. Now look at her as she stands," said he; "there's a sweep of line for you! Talk of curves! If she is not a splendid model, I never saw one. Will you wait while I sketch her, old fellow, and get a near look at her?"

"No," said Johnson, "I won't; you would talk to her for an hour, and spoil the light on my Waterfall. The sun will be over that bank directly. I will leave you here, though, if you like," said he.

"You had better not," said Archer; "with so much gipsy beauty there, I might use up half my block and all my pencils."

"Come on, then," said Johnson, "and look before you, or I shall have to pick you out of one of those gorse bushes directly, if you keep gazing yonder at that Cleopatra-looking damsel. There, that's right, she has vanished into the tent. Now step," said he; "five minutes more will bring us to the wood."

"Well, here's the gate, then," said Archer, as they came up to it. "Now over with you."

"Are there any snakes?" said Johnson, hesitating.

"Heaps of them, I should say," said Archer. "They won't hurt us, though; but if you see an adder, respect his tail. Come on!"

"I don't like snakes, John, even if they don't hurt," said Johnson; "besides, that Anglers' Arms youth may be wrong, and if we met the keepers——"

"Nonsense," said Archer; "he's a chum of theirs; he has the poacher in his very look. Here's off," said he; and with that Archer got into the wood, and pushed on through the briers up the bank, so Johnson followed; but when he reached the top, no John was there. He heard his voice, though, in "Look out, up there; mind where you're coming to!" But before he had time to think about its meaning, or to see where it came from, he found himself going downwards through the bushes, and then he too came bump into a snug deep sand-hole, and found Archer by him laughing at his plight. "Snakes! snakes!" cried Archer; and up rose old Johnson, with, seeing he was sold,

"Now drop that, John; that is past a joke, you know! How came you here?"

"Viâ bushes, brambles, hollowed ground, and sand-hole; the same as you," said he. "Well, how's your back? I had no idea of this big drop, old fellow."

But after dusting jackets, both went on, Archer impressing upon Brother Johnson his own ideas as to retribution, in dragging him away from gipsy beauty. Johnson, however, made such slow progress through minding where he stepped, that Archer at length took compassion on him, and told him there were never any snakes known there until July; and as for adders, Dingle Hole, and not there, was their locality, and anyway, they seldom showed till it was blazing weather.

So then they got on a bit; but the further they went and the higher they ascended the denser became the undergrowth, that at last they came to a complete standstill. "Hush!" said Archer, as they were about turning back to find some path or fewer bramble bushes; "there's water, certainly. I hear a hum and splash and deep down somewhere. Listen!"

"Yes, so do I," said Johnson; "and we are not far from it. Can you creep through there?" said he. "It may be better on the other side."

"I will see," said Archer. "No, it is merely a rabbit run," said he, as he propelled himself back again, feet first. "We must go round—or stay," said he, "perhaps there is a way. If I twist the plaid"—which Archer had with him in case of wet, and to save the weight of a coat—"over my eyes, and you push behind, we might bore through it, I fancy, if it does lead anywhere. Now, come on, Johnson, after me," he said, "and hunch your back up."

So butting at it, and pushed on by Johnson, the briers gave way.

"How far are we now?" shouted Johnson, whose head was down, as he was busy pushing.

"Hold hard a bit, and I'll look," said Archer, lifting the plaid with one hand as he steadied himself on his knees with the other. "This thing half smothers me! By Jove, old fellow," said he, "it was well you spoke. Another minute would have settled us. Push back, and pull me back; I'm hanging over it!"

"Over what?" said Johnson.

"The Waterfall!" said he. "Be quick, this ground is hollow. It is eighty feet to fall, if it's an inch!" So, lying flat and keeping still, he let himself be dragged from there by Johnson; and when he felt his feet, he was not sorry.

"Is it safe for me to look," said Johnson, "if you hold me?"

"No," Archer said; "your weight would be too risky. I am sure the ground felt hollow—don't you go. However, here is the Waterfall," said he. "Now, how are we to reach it? Muffled in that plaid wrap, I could not hear it. A near thing, Johnson!"

"Upon my word it was," said he. "We will try down here."

So then, working down the bank, they at length hit upon a twig, and following it, they came upon the brook, and looking up it, they saw the Waterfall, just where the wood seemed cleft into a gully.

And Johnson saw at once that it would suit him, for the surroundings were good, and there was no lack of water there.

In fact, it was a big fall for the woodlands, and fell well; as it dropped the depth—from blue sky to gray stones—in two short falls, and one wide sheet of foam, into the dark brown water of the dingle; that splashed the harts-tongue and the foxglove leaves, and sprinkled all the bushes that met over it; then darted in and out through rugged banks, hollowed and worn into breaks and holes; and so away, with lessening murmur, to the river meadows.

The gully where it fell had sloping banks, fern-clad and tangled; that rose up abruptly and shut out the light, with ash and beech, and larch and strong-grown firs, that shadowed with half-tint one half the fall, and left it white above, where white was wanted; just where the sandstone showed, with gray tints on it.

"Yes, this will do," said Johnson, as he looked at the white foam leaping over the slimy slabs, that were green with the wrack of years, and that had long dripping lengths of it hanging to them; where, with atmospheric colour in between, and clear of all beneath, the Fall fell over.

So there he "pitched."

"Look above you, Johnson," said Archer. "Do you see those bent ferns drooping at the top—there, where the bank is sandy and hollowed, by that big bush that sends such trailers down?"

"Yes, I see them; what of it?" said he.

"Only," replied Archer, "the ferns that you see there are those I clutched, to try to save myself, when you sung out, and I just raised the scarf."

"The deuce they are! A lucky shout for you! Why, from there is deeper, as it seems to me," said Johnson, "than from the top of Grantley tower, although it is fully half-way down the Fall."

"Yes, quite so," Archer said; "that sweep of white foam rather startled me, as it looked from there as if I was all but in it."

"And are not you going to sketch it too?" said Johnson.

"Not I," said Archer. "I will do a pipe, old boy, and watch you working. It will steady my nerves a bit, and keep me quiet."

The forms and shadows too, were soon marked out, and all the salient points touched-in by Johnson; John Archer watching as the tints were mixed, or roaming round and looking all about him. Wanderings were what he liked; they suited him far better than the sketching.

For he was one who often loved to linger in the dim light of narrow country lanes, sprayed over as they were with twisting briony, and tangled up with woodbine and with hop, or flickering with their greenery of leaves. And he liked to listen too to the soft wind's whispers, as it stole past him to the distant hills, fresh from the pine-woods and the woodland flowers; and to sit and think by brambled rills, that rippled through the long copses with a half-hushed melody; or to loll about there on the thick soft moss, and look up through the ferns—lucent with light—to watch white clouds above him, slowly moving.

Or under bending branches, where birds swayed to those that seemed to sway and sing to them, up through the water, where blue came and went, as boughs against the sky waved to and fro. To lie about the hills on beds of thyme, and listen to the bees—the only sound, perchance,

but rustling leaves, or the tinkle of a sheep-bell by the water.

To loll with head in hands, and look straight out, past green grass fields to purples in the woods; and thence with thankfulness to distant towns, known by the wreaths of smoke from pent-up houses; and see the laggard rooks wing from their homes, long after others had sailed slowly by; or watch brown hovering hawks swoop down, and rise with curve, to flutter as they poised again. To catch the sound of children in the lanes, whose happy laughs came to him as he lay; or silvery tones of bells upon the air, borne by the wind in changing waves of sound. To scent the smell of cows and new-mown hay, and wafts from bean-fields and from sweet wild-flowers.

These were the things that Archer loved to seek; these and a thousand others just as simple; but simple as they were, true joys to him.

And Johnson painted on, while Archer lay with his hands behind his head, full length in grass; watching the rings of smoke float up and break, and listening to the murmurs of the Fall; the only sound, and that a drowsy one, that would have sent him soon fast off to sleep, but for the frequent comments of friend Johnson, who now exhorted him to stir himself.

"Come here a bit, and give me your opinion; and then," said Johnson, "I will immortalise that velvet jacket, if you will pose for me. I want a figure."

"Wise child," said Archer, "I can see you know, like Hulme, the value of a bit of black, and are not quite a vulgar little boy, to stick red dabs in every bit of green. No "complimentary colour on the brain" hast thou," said he, "to think of red the moment you see green. I have, I must say, hopes of you, old man."

"Yes," Johnson said, "I like a bit of black, if not too positive. Relieved with touch of brown, or plum, or purple, just where the light falls, or where it is the strongest, is, I find, best, John, for most greens in masses—spring greens especially. Red makes them crude, if it is not well, handled, and often sacrifices half the picture. 'How well that red cloak comes against those trees!' are words to me," said he, "that show the figure has too much prominence; the figure first, the rest subordinate.

"Red lights a landscape, as you see, with hounds," said

Johnson ; " there you have life and motion ; the bustle of your subject will admit it ; but in a pastoral it kills repose, unless it is well rendered. Stone-tint and lilac, with a bit of black, I often use ; or white and purple, if it is not spotty ; but red I, as a rule," said he, " use sparingly, and but for figure-subjects ; unless sometimes a bit to save repainting, to force the greens, if I have kept them low. Come ! come on, Archie—how you stand about !—and just look here. Hold hard ! one minute—that is just the thing. Right spot, right colour. Stay where you are," said Johnson ; " I will sketch you first."

" All right," said Archer ; " then I will put the pipe out, and not be taken as given to bad habits."

" Yes, do," said Johnson, whose beard was hidden by a misty blue, from smoke ascending. Now, do the recumbent, and just drop that arm, down on your elbow ; yes, that, the right one ; and the left leg up, and resting on the heel ; the other out. All right," said he ; " now keep so."

" Thanks," Johnson said, in some ten minutes after. " The velvet in blue-black immortalised ! And now," said he, " come here."

" It comes well, certainly," said Archer, looking. " It will make a picture. I like, so far, the general tone and tint. There is a nice breadth too about it, and a mystery along the bottom of the glen that tells. What tempting ground," said he, " to those Pre-raphaelites, whose pictures seem just now to set men raving. Why, they would vein what you but 'indicate'—those brookside blossoms, and those ferns and things."

" A fashion, John ; an oddity," said Johnson. " Years hence you will find some of these microscopists will paint broadly. No hard metallic work like theirs can live long ; nor will it pay them to paint in that style one instead of many. For students learning form, I hold with it, even to its utmost finish ; but not for men who, if they choose, could indicate all form with perfect truth. No argument will ever make me credit their dictum as to distance. My eyes," said he, " tell me when blurred forms are right, and blended tints come truly."

" Ignoring atmosphere, and sun and shade, and looking on blue haze as something wrong, because of blended forms they have a horror, they make their leaves as cut out by a tinman ; and trees three miles off are patterned as the one

against your nose ; serrations, veins, and all. Monstrous absurdity ! As if they could improve on nature, John !

“Look down the glen,” said he. “Well, there are ferns and flowers, and all things as minute as on these banks. Why, I,” said Johnson, “may just as well depict them leaf by leaf, if their rule holds, merely because they are so when you reach them ; instead of, as you see, and as all might see, outline and colour too quite lost in haze. I paint just what I see,” said he ; at least, I try too ; not what I know can be found there for searching. They make me angry when they talk such nonsense !” And Johnson dashed in colour vigorously.

“Give me just half an hour,” said he, “and then I am with you. I must get those lights, and just those tender half-tints. This will work in oil, if I have luck with it. I shall oval it,” said he, “and so get rid of that dark ugly corner. It will save me having also too much bank.”

“Well, get along,” said Archer. “I think it will.”

At length he finished it, and packed and started.

“Now,” said John Archer, “don’t let us come to grief. Which way do you steer ?”

“Oh, push on up the bank,” was the reply ; “straight for that bit of blue sky at the top. We shall see where all this water comes from then, and see the country. I should know the inn again,” said Johnson, “were I to see it. It is near to Shipley bridge, and by the river.”

“On with you, then,” said Archer. “As you have been working, let me have the traps. I’ll carry.”

So they went on, scrambling from ledge to ledge, pushing through the ferns—that, cool there, were hip-high already—and dragging through the brambles and the bushes, until they got to the top of the wood ; where they found that the cause of the Fall was a wide brook, that came along the level at the top, and then dropped over ; and that, filling from a spring, had a good depth of water always in it.

From where they were the valley itself was hidden ; they could only see the wooded hills just opposite them ; and now that they were away from the hum of the waterfall, the birds’ songs could be heard the plainer.

All along the brook at the top of the wood, where it ran inside the hedgerow, were hyacinths innumerable ; for the wood about there was literally full of them, and blue

over—that purple blue that is so visible when they are massed together; and there were even primroses there too, still in blossom in the shady places; and as to white wood-anemones and violets, there were clouds of them.

And as they stood there, irresolute which turn to take, listening to the “chip cheep, twit tweet, peep peep” of the small birds, and the harsh “cauk cauk” of the pheasants as they came drumming over them, and watching the glorious shades of green that were upon the undergrowth, and the white lights, and the yellow lights and the grays, and the half-tints—as they looked along it under the trees, far away into the depths of the wood—where, as Johnson pointed out, “blue haze blended them”—they heard the rattle of a chain, and turning for the sound saw a man, evidently a keeper, stooping down, setting a steel trap in some ferns; that, as they—Johnson and Archer—went up to him, he said was for dogs that came hunting the game there; but, as Archer observed, “Confound him, more likely for foxes.” However, he put them in the right road, and that was all they wanted.

“There’s a stile at the end,” said he, “if you follow this trig, that will bring you into a meadow—there are some people there. Go through that, over the common beyond it, and past the cottages, and you will then see the river; keep alongside it till you come to the bridge, and there you are—Shipley Ford; and the inn is by it.”

So, thanking him, they went on through the wood, and soon reached the meadow, a long lengthy one, down in a dip, where were some cowslip-pickers, busy after the second crop of blossoms; or rather with their second picking—cowslips now being plentiful.

“I must have this,” said Johnson. “This is first-rate; there is good colour here.”

“Oh, bother sketching it!” said Archer; “make a note of it. I am getting hungry. Here, give me a pencil,” said he, “and while you note the colour, I will mark in the general outline and the position of the figures. You cannot go in for more than a memorandum, old fellow; the time won’t allow it. Consider the calls of hunger,” said Archer, “and remember that cook you spoke of.”

“Very well,” said Johnson, fishing out his H.B.; “here you are, then.”

And while Archer indicated with it relative position and surroundings, Johnson wrote; and this was what he wrote :—

“Three women and two children well together—pale tan and lilac, pink and white and black, an olive, russet, and a dingy brown. Cool greens around from foliage clustered close, by sparkling water; on either side, and sloping, gleamy uplands, with softened hedgerows, broken up and bushy. At end a wavy line—a length of trees—marking the brook; beyond it, meadows and copses, and a slip of plough, against a far-off distance, blue and hilly.”

“Have you done?” said Archer, who was a rapid sketcher.

“No,” said Johnson, going on writing; “nor you, I hope, just yet.”

“A team-road in the foreground, rough and rutty; a gate thrown open, and an old archway, rich in dark greens and madders, round deep shadow. Some bright-leaved sprays just dipping in the water, that lies unrippled underneath the hedge. Blue sky aloft, a lark high up and soaring, above soft sunny clouds of pale warm-gray. A shadow from them right athwart the meadow, and where the figures are, a breadth of light.”

“There,” said Johnson, closing his note-book, “I am right, if you are. What do you make of it? Yes, that will do,” said he, as Archer showed it him. “So now come on.”

So, going on by the hedgerow, they got over the stile on to the common, when “’Ware gipsies, John,” said Johnson, as he saw lots of tents and donkeys about there. “I too begin to feel as though a fizzing chop and a walnut would not disagree with me. Come, come along,” said he. “Hang your Cleopatras! They seem all old women there.”

Archer had therefore to scuffle on through the gorse bushes, and they soon reached the road and the cottages that were by the side of it—a little hamlet that was lost in bloom—pear, plum, and cherry; and apple-blossom thickening on the boughs. And at the turn beyond there they saw the river, down in the meadows in front of them.

Getting over a one-barred stile, that led them through a hop-yard and an orchard, and that cut the corner off, they came into the road again at the bend, and were then

close to the river, that there, and for a length of two miles more or so, wound on beside it, or but a meadow from it; but, as the shadows from the trees were lengthening, they passed all "bits" but one, as time was pressing.

That was not much, it is true; but still 'twas picturesque. It was a pool that was half-circled by thick woods, and filled with reeds; with a half-sunk boat at the side of it, and an old dead tree, with long white arms, and a heron and some firs. "A good bit for a twilight," Johnson said.

But one they saw that was much nearer to the inn, was so well liked by Johnson, that he sketched it early next morning, and laid it in in colour while they stayed there.

It was a corner cottage, very near the turnpike. A stained, half-timbered, tumble-down old place, heaped up with ivy, which, in great masses, clung about the thatch on roof and shed, and from the chimney-stack linked with its leafage both the tree and gate; thus framing with dark green the cottage-door, where—when Johnson sketched it—an old dame sat knitting—one Mrs. Dormer—clad in soft grays and browns.

A black cat by her, cottage-ware behind—cream, white, and blue—above a red-tiled floor. A nook of primroses, a shrub or two, some velvet gillies, and odd pots and pans. At the back a fagot-rick, and swinging colour—some line-clothes blowing—against a wooded bank that sloped to corn, that would give good colour next the blue in autumn.

At length the inn was reached, itself a picture.

Of note with anglers, who stayed there for greyling, and a haunt of artists for its river scenes, the old inn still showed much the character that it had when known as Shipley Manor House, in olden days, when peopled by old folks; who then but little thought their cherished rooms would be used as they had to be, when all was sold, through reckless living, to the highest bidder; who let it go to rack, resold and altered it some years ago for present purposes, leaving the outside partly as it was—a boon to those who sketched it.

For there were great bulk-windows, diamond-paned and leaded; greystone steps, that curved out to the road; deep-red chimneys, each with twist and clustered; high-pitched roofs with timbers, carved and quaint; and a side entrance-porch, with olden date. And tall dark poplars

still kept guard behind it, and rooks still gathered in the rookery.

And the trim old-fashioned garden was still there, with turf walks, box borders, and its old cut yews, fashioned fantastically. And the sweetbrier corner and the cabbage-roses; and the wealth of honeysuckle; and the beds of herbs, that still were famed for divers maladies.

The ivy-wreathed old sundial too was there, crumbling away amidst bright beds of flowers, where pigeons cooed and strutted all about, and plumed their feathers by the little fountain; that with one jet there, musical and tiny, and under the arching shade of bending boughs, sparkled and shimmered in the noonday sun, against a background of dark glossy leaves.

Within the house, though many rooms were altered, there still were large ones, wainscoted and carved; but upstairs they were divided—all but three at least—those double-bedded. And one of those, that looked upon the garden, had been engaged by Johnson, for him and Archer; and there they found their traps. The man had brought them, and gone back with the dog-cart in good time. And they found all there very comfortable; so looking forward to a very jolly week before going on to Newland, they did justice to their dinner, and enjoyed it.

And after dinner they turned out again, and strolled just for a smoke up to the bridge; and there they leaned upon the parapet, and watched the apple-green up in the sky blend with the rose, and so change into gray. And as the moon loomed forth full light and large, then paled and lessened over the distant woods—the woods where they had been above the valley—the gray gave place to blue, and stars showed on it.

And below them was the river, washing under the arches, and rippling down in the deep shadow of the willowed banks to the curve beyond them; where, widened by the rushings of the floods, it shone like molten silver, broad and bright; full in the moonlight, underneath a cliff; that pale sand-red, sloped upwards to the fields, where gray-greens softened into thin white fog.

Then bats came out, and flitted up the meadows; the white fog spread, the red forge-fire died down; the cottage sparks went out, inn lights got higher; and soon the only sound was water—running.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE QUARRY FARM AT THE FISHING FORD—THE PICNIC-PARTY.

JUNE—"the month of roses"—the month of dainty colours and sweet scents.

How that word "roses" brings the beautiful! Sweet tints around, sweet odours in the air; remembrances of rose-shows, "*Gloire de Dijon*," "*Safran*," "*Jacqueminots*," and fair "*Coupe d'Hébés*." The very name of June has rose scent in it, the very thought of it brings heaps of blossoms, and sends us off to Kew and to "the Palace," the Horticultural, and the name of Paul. And thence to roses clustered in the country, climbing to casements, or on garden walls, along with jessamine and honeysuckle—sweet-smelling rivals—at cosy places hidden up in trees, and cool green leafage; where softest, richest, creamiest of blooms are gathered by fond fingers tenderly; blossoms that, as you think of them, bring their fair sisters in the woods to view, whose paler petals fall where song-birds sing.

That thought brings foxglove-bells and woodbine hedges; wild vetch and briony, wild hop and bearbine; and grass knee-high, and ankle-deep in flowers; and bees and butterflies, and ferns and leaves; the sound of mowers, and the smell of hay; and all those country scenes June is so full of. The woodland walks too, and the shady lanes; the evening rambles by the rippling river; the swallows flying low, the bats and glow-worms; the nightingales, and moonlight on the water.

The thymy hills, and golden gorsy commons; the charm of sunlight when in charm of shade; the hum of insect-life, the hum of bees; the listless lying under leafy boughs, with half-closed book, or quite-neglected paper; the noisy bleatings where the shearers are; the call to horses, and the creak of wheels, up in the woods, where men are moving timber.

The thoughts that June brings with it are all pleasant ones; and the thoughts that this June brought were doubly pleasant to certain ladies at the Grange and Rosary; for in this month would be their wedding-day; that "day of days" to loved and loving ones.

And Johnson and John Archer had returned from their sketching-tour; Archer with a few sketches, and Johnson with a heap of them; and both looking the browner for their little "out." And Miss Clare had come to the Rosary, with her mother, to remain there till her wedding-day. And in the week that had elapsed since her arrival fresh roses had been added to her cheeks; for as Miss Johnson was an early riser, and she—Miss Clare—slept with her, she had been up betimes each morning; and out and about, and all round the garden, long before breakfast was ready, "to blow the town smoke off her cheeks," as she said, "and get the true country colour into them."

But no one at the Rosary did lie late; for they were early people at night, and the birds were early in the morning; and as there were plenty of them chirruping about there, when once they were in full song, trying to go to sleep again was useless. First, there would be that monotonous cuckoo, having it all to himself, till the swallows were ready; when they would have their half hour under the eavings; and as they ceased their twitterings, the blackbirds would begin in the shrubbery; and then the sparrows would rustle up in the ivy, and wrangle and settle, and scuffle up again and quarrel; when the starlings, and the finches, and the blackcaps, and the linnets, would have their little chatter; and if there was any rain near at hand, the robins too would make themselves heard, by singing lustily.

That what with the birds singing and the sun shining—for the spare rooms there faced east—visitors at the Rosary soon found that the best thing they could do on a summer morning was to turn out at once, and have done with it.

And—as Jane Clare told her cousin when she wrote to her—there was something very pleasant about it, that getting up early, for it was so nice, and so different from town. "First of all," she said, "we go into the garden, and have the first smell at the roses, while the dew is on them—a good sniff at each of them; and we look at the beds to see what fresh flowers are out; and we listen to the birds, and chat to the old gardener, and poke all round about there; and then we go up the long steps, under the sweetbrier and the honeysuckles and the cluster-roses, to the kitchen-garden. Such a dear old place, with wide

turf-walks, and a beautiful laurel arbour, so thick; and a long wall, with young plums and apricots on it, and peaches and nectarines; and there are pear-trees and apple-trees and a nut-tree walk—oh, such a long one, and so shady!

“So,” said she, “we just look at the sloping beds, where the peas and the beans and all sorts of things grow; and then we have a rout amongst the strawberries, to see how they are coming on, and the gooseberries and the raspberries and the currants; and notice what a good year of nuts it will be; and we look at the places in the hedge where the rabbits come in, and we wish we could see some of them, or the hare that the old man says comes there.

“Then, dear,” she continued—for it all seemed so nice she wanted to tell her cousin “all about it”—“you must know, we trot from there up into the orchard—oh, such a nice banky one—where you can look over the farm-buildings below it, and see into the fold-yard; only fancy! And we see, now the blossom is blowing off them—and, do you know, it looks so like snow!—what a lot of apples and pears there will be, and how well the cherry-trees promise for the white ambers we are both so fond of!

“And as we stand there under the trees, looking at the beautiful hills and the woods over the river, we hear the fowls and the geese that are below us; and the lowing of the cows, as they are being had up from the meadows for milking; and the sound of the team in the field; and the pawing of the hackney horses in the stables; and the splash of the ducks in the pool; and the bark of the big house-dog; and the sound of the chaff-cutter; and the chopping by the girl at the wood-pile; and the laughs of the lads as they race round the rick-steads; and the noise of the men in the saw-pit, who shout to them; and oh, such a lot of things, and so different, you know, from town, and the cries there!

“All up one side of the rick-yard, too, there are lilacs and laburnums, and red and white hawthorn-trees and chestnuts; and a copper-beech or two, for there is a shrubbery, and we can hear the birds there singing; and on the nearer side, and growing down below it, there are some walnut-trees; and we see the starlings, that have nests there, flying backwards and forwards; and we can even hear, if we listen, the chirp of the young ones as

they come to them. Then, as we stand there, looking up the valley at the fog rising, there come such wafts of hay, it's beautiful; and we can hear the girls and the women at their work, and the old farmer talking to them, and rating at the dogs, as they scout amongst the haycocks.

"And then, you know, dear, there are the rooks and the jays and the magpies, all on the caw and the chatter; and lots of pigeons about; and we catch the sound of the doves in the woods, and the tinkle of the bell in the meadows; and it seems all so new, and it is so nice, I do wish, dear, you were with us! And there is not a bit of smoke—only think!—that is, like our smoke at least; only the tiniest bit of it, and that is blue; so blue that you can only see it as it curls up against the trees to the sky. So nice, you know, and all so clean!"

Thus would the little lady run on, gossiping page after page, to her friends in Bristol; for now that the country was to be "her home," she took notice of everything; and it all had a charm for her.

And on this morning, as she was dressing, and put the window wide open to let in the sweet scent of the roses, while she "did" her hair—for they not only ran below the sill, but clustered all about it—she looked as rosy and as radiant as a country girl; and then, with her sunny curls all about her shoulders—the brighter for the dark-brown hair that was beside them—she stood there with Jessie, looking down at "her little birdies" in the nest below them, snug in the roses, and snipped off two or three of the blossoms to put in her dress, no one could have accused John Archer of bad taste, had he chosen his lady-love for looks alone.

"We shall have a beautiful day," said Jane; "see how the fog is rising."

"Yes," said Jessie, "and a warm one too; and, I have no doubt, a pleasant one. John—your John, Jennie—has arranged everything; and we are to dine in the wood, play croquet in the orchard, have a row on the river, and a ramble all about there; and then tea—gipsy fashion—in the old quarry, which, he says, is now all wild-roses and honeysuckles. Won't it be nice? And then we are to have a dance afterwards—John has got a fiddle—and stay for the glow-worms and the nightingales, and drive home in the moonlight. It will be quite delightful, will it not?"

And I hear Rose will have it so comfortable for us. Fancy, what a lot of us—twenty-two!”

“What, ladies?” said Jane.

“No,” said Jessie; “equally divided; eleven ladies and eleven gentlemen.”

It was the day of the visit to Rose Harrison—the picnic at the Quarry Farm. And as the ladies came downstairs, and went into the garden—“Why, there is John!” said Jessie—“John James” he owned to, though his friends never called him so; “Johnson,” “Old Johnson,” or “J.J.,” being their designation—“he is down before us.”

“Yes, and out too, you lazy ones!” said he, as he met them and kissed them. “I have the start of you for once. I am getting some of my best roses for Mrs. Harrison—she is fond of them—and a bunch for Nellie. She is up there, John says; and she is such a nice child, that I must take her some.”

Johnson was a great lover of roses, and he had always some good ones; for what with close-cutting them in the autumn, mossing them in the winter, and smoking them in the spring, brushing off the fly, and pinching off the curled leaves, his roses always turned out well; and with a little “bass,” and a little trouble at the proper time, he always managed to have good, well-formed, cup-like blossoms. The place was rightly named the Rosary, for roses abounded there. How many different sorts there were there, it is hard to say. No doubt more than many would believe, for he had nearly every good rose he could procure—standards, dwarfs, and climbers.

And the arrangement of them was a great thing with him, for he had an eye for both harmony and contrast, and a weakness for curves; and believing in “the line of beauty,” he extended that belief even to his rose-sticks; that, from the tall one in the centre, with the old “Giant of Battles,” lessened inch by inch, to the outer borders; so that when the roses were in blossom—if even they were planted in a straight line—he got a bow-like sweep of colour for a backing.

He was very great too, was Johnson, at colour; and what with his little circular dots at the bottom of each standard—each one filled in with a different blossom—his bright geometrical beds, and his judicious arrangement of

his light roses—the apricot, blush, white, primrose, and peach tints—in amongst the darker-coloured ones, his garden, when once the roses were out, was always worth looking at.

He was a great hand also at pole-work; and had lots of tall loose masses of white convolvulus, hops, honey-suckles, canariensis, and other climbers, dispersed about; and old tumps and rockery; and woodland-looking fern bits—vistas of them that you came upon suddenly, and where they went back for a distance under the shade of the boughs. He was very fond of his garden; and as working in it was a pleasure to him, it always therefore looked well.

“Come,” said Mrs. Clare, as she stood in the porch, framed in with roses, “are you young people almost ready for breakfast?”

“Coming, aunt,” cried Jessie; and they went in.

“Is it not nice, mamma?” said Jane, as they sat at breakfast, with the windows wide open to the lawn, and sweet scents coming to them. “I know I shall love the country!”

“I have no doubt you will,” said Mrs. Clare; “for even in the winter the snow will at least be white and crisp, and not lie in dirty heaps, as it does with us. You ought to like it, however,” said she, “for I know you will be happy.”

“I am sure I shall, mamma, very happy!” said Jane.

At eleven the phaeton was brought round, and they started—Johnson the driver; and calling on their way at Grantley, they had the company of a wagonetteful from there; and so they were very merry all the way to Holme Wood, where they met with Burton and his party just driving off from Boscabel; Florence looking, as she sat on the box by the side of him, the picture of happiness. The Cliftons, the doctor and his wife, and a brother of his, who was also a surgeon, and Wells, and the Honeybrook people, were already at the farm when they got there; and Miss Nellie’s tongue could be heard as they turned the corner, so many horses about making the youngster quite excited.

The congratulations to Rose and her husband were as warm as they were sincere; and after the one had seen to the ladies, and the other to the horses, they all started for

a ramble in the wood; Miss Nellie along with them, on the pony, fastened on, and in charge of little Jane, the girl from the "Black Country," who, by her happy look, seemed quite content at having exchanged pit-banks for green fields.

And by the time those who had wandered through the wood had picked as many wild flowers as they could carry, those intrusted with the arrangements of the dinner had got it all ready for them in the open space at the bottom of "The Steps," between the sheet of blue hyacinths, that were still in blossom there, and the little spring under the wild-rose bushes, where it dropped into the brook, that could be heard gurgling away through the dingle. And when the white cloth in the centre was covered with all the good things brought there, and the ladies in their light summer dresses were sat about on warm rugs and wrappers—the gentlemen waiting on them—it was a pretty scene, with pretty surroundings; the trees and brushwood all round rising high above them, and the blue sky showing through the tree-tops. They all enjoyed themselves, and were very merry; and after dinner—when the ladies had strolled off and come back again while the gentlemen dined—there was an adjournment to the farm; and then some went boating, some went wandering, and some played croquet. The first-named ones were of Burton's party; and as Charlie had brought his cornet with him, and Florence and the other ladies in the boat had good voices, their musical strains could be heard by the others long after they had passed round the bend of the river.

At tea-time all were together again, and busy about it, with the kettle "gipsy-fashion," in the old quarry; the smoke from the fire curling up amongst the masses of elder-bloom, honeysuckles, ferns, foxgloves, and roses, which there draped the blocks of white stone round them. The sound of the cornet, followed by the waking up of the harp-man and the fiddler, led to a dispersal, and a reassembling on the lawn in front of the long room. There dancing commenced; the dowagers of the party remaining in the room, enjoying a sight of it, and having their own little gossips on the scene and the company.

As the moon rose, the dancers got fewer; many having strolled away "to look for the glow-worms," and "to listen

to the nightingales;" a colourable pretext at the least, if one open to question. However, when the delinquents joined the supper-party in the long room, they escaped lightly; for there were three of the ladies and three of the gentlemen there, if not more, who could fully sympathise with those ardent investigators of natural history, whose pursuit of science had thus compelled them to lose so much of the dancing.

At length the time came for leave-taking. Nellie, who had remained up, "for this once only," had more kisses than she had ever had before in one day; Rose and her husband were warmly thanked for their care of them; the heaps of ferns and wild-flowers were got together; the lady glow-worms—those wanderers had really something to show, though, after all—were peeped at, to see if they still hung out their green lights; and then, Harry Wells taking the reins, Charlie started his cornet, and his drag led the way, followed by the wagonette and the phaeton; the occupants of each carriage being very merry, and singing along the country lanes as they went home by moonlight; a few listening to the nightingales, and a few others enjoying their own conversation too much to take any heed of them.

But those were Honeybrook people, and perhaps they had heard them before; though neither Miss Oliver nor yet Miss Andrews, nor even the respective brothers of those young ladies, ventured to assert as much—for it is not always prudent to go into particulars.

CHAPTER XL.

GRANTLEY BELFRY—THOMAS JONES AND JOE THE FIDDLER.

"THEE munna do it, a tell tha; theer'll be a row about it," said old John, who was one of a party assembled in the belfry of Grantley Church; for it was the eve of the wedding-day of John Archer of the Grange, and John James Johnson of the Rosary; and they had a good deal to see to in consequence.

"But we oon do it," said big Reuben Roe, the head man amongst the ringers; "and we dunna kear ef theer be a row, now then; dun we, maaaites?"

"Not a bit on it," said Thomas Jones; "dun we, Joe?"

"No," said old Joe the fiddler; "why shoon us?"

"Ay, why indeed?" said Bob Cratchitt, the man who had a saying for everything; "it be ony when you be askin' a faavour that your naame be 'Humble;' what do you saay, Barnes?"

"Saame here," said burly Barnes the blacksmith; "what be your opinion on it, Tom?"

"I goes for independence, all the world over," said jolly Tom Styles the earth-stopper.

Styles and Barnes had driven over from Deepdale, six miles from Grantley, and had brought Jane and Martha, the butter-women, from Warden's, along with them, as they had each of them friends in the village.

"Well, I agrees ooth feyther," said Tom Harris, with whom old John was staying.

"That's roight, Tom lad," said old John; "thee alleys did stan' by thee feyther; a ool saay that for tha."

"Well, it be this awaay," said Roe, "what's to hinder us? Bain't the parson awaay, an' bain't it a strainger as be a-comin' to huck 'em togither? an' d'ye think ef so be as he do cut up rough, as we be agwain to stan' any o' his imperance? Not loikely," said Roe. "What be he to we? Nothin'! We dunna belang to him, dun us?" And Reuben looked round the company for an answer.

"Not disakly," said Cratchitt; "still, sometoimes when you tries to snuff another mon's candle out, you burns your fingers."

"That be it, Bob," said old John.

"I oona ha' it," said Roe decisively; "I sticks up fur the peal; an' as soon as the cans be out, mates, ween ha' it, darn me if we dunna; an' afore we leaves this blessed tower this night, theer now! An' ef them oud owls a'rn't a started a-mousin', ween shaake the oud feathers out on 'em, wi the nise on it!"

"That's roight," said Styles; "taake the chance now you got it; they be both on 'em tidy young men, an' they be worthy on it."

"Well, certainly," said Bob, coming round a bit, now he saw the feeling was against him; "you conna alleys catch a floy when you waants one."

"Ha' it your own waay then," said John; "but youn see."

"Well, this bain't your belfry now, be it?" said Roe; "though we respects you, an' respects your son."

"Thank you for nothin'," said Tom Harris.

"Wheer be tha gwain too?" said Thomas Jones, seeing a row imminent, and wishing to settle them down a bit.

"To Payris," said John.

"And wheer be Payris?" asked Jones; "I never heerd o' Payris."

"Then that shows your broughtin's up," said John.

"Well, wheer be it, thin?" said Jones.

"Why, furrin parts," said old John promptly, wishing to get out of the difficulty.

"Thin that be wheer the monkey comed from?" said Jones, with sudden enlightenment.

"What monkey?" said Cratchitt.

"Whoy, the one as we sin o' the quay," said Jones, "when we took'd the hops in; as were dressed in a red coat, an' fired a gun off loike a Christian. He waanted to be too polite though, darn his body, an' shaake 'ands ooth ma; but, thank you, I warn't comed to that it, to shaake 'ands ooth a monkey."

"I'se sartin sure that be wrong, Thomas Jones," said John. "I dunna know much about the t'other, but I'se sure Mayster John oodna goo to a plaice wheer they grows monkeys."

"Well, dayn't thee 'saay Payris were furrin parts?" said Jones.

"Is, I did," said John, "an' I'll stan' by it."

"Then in coorse they grows monkeys theer, for the monkey's man told ma."

"I dunna belave it," said John, nettling up.

"Now, wee oona ha' any wranglin' here," said Roe; "we be met here for bisniss; so let's be ppaceable, an' git on ooth it. Pass the can, Joe."

"That's right," said Joe, handing him the cider; "harmony be best. I ony wish I'd brought my fiddle."

"Ah, you'n a good voice to beg bacon, you han," said Cratchitt. "Pride be a flower as grows in the Old Un's garden, Joe."

"Be quiet, Bob," said Roe; "I oona ha' old Joe put

upon; he be a useful mon among us, and I respects him. We be settled on 'the peal,' then, mates?"

"Is, quite settled," "Done ooth," "Saay no more," "Ween ha' it," were the respective responses to the question.

"Then huroo, says I, my boys," cried Reuben; "an I'se glad on it. Arn't our new parson took'd the instruments awaay, an' put up that orgin—as be a shaame, and maakes Hill Coombe and the t'other villages lick us? They does goo through their religion proper-loike, they does; but as fur we—well, webe done ooth. I oodna plaay now ef he axed ma. We anna bin loike the saame sin he come; no, we hanna!"

"That's sure," said Jones. "We usen to be comfortable-loike o' a Sunday, and git a nap, quiet, i' the sarmun; but this here chap, darn me if he'll let un; he be for 'the proper,' he be; I niver gits no nap now, scarce!"

"And then agin," said Roe, "whoy conna he prache comfortable-loike, not goo on a terrifyin' us as he dun. We alleys thought oursels, under the oud mon as rayther a tidy lot o' folk; but bost me if he dunna sometoimes maaake us scrotch our yuds, an' ax oursels a questin. Anywaays, he dunna maike us out to be so over good as we thought we was, dun he now?"

"No," said Bob Cratchitt; "he be all for religion, he be; I nivr met ooth such a feller! Whoy, I heerd he was akshally a gwain to open the church o' week-daays."

"Then ef iver it comes to that, theer'l be a chaange o' the plaice, moind if theer oona," said Jones. "Whoy, he bin roun' a toime or two i' the parish to ax whoy we didna goo to church ivery Sunday, an' as we oughter goo mornin' an' evenin'? so you may guess he's a honconshabble pusson."

"Is," said Barnes, "that be a-comin' it too strong, that be."

"Let the parson be," said old John; "he hanna hurt you. Here be the cans harf out, and we hanna got to bisness it!"

"Well, be the band arranged ooth?" said Joe the fiddler.

"Is, 'em be," said old John; "an' they knows wheer to stan', when to plaay, an' what they be to plaay; an' they is to emember as you be the fiddler, an' has first pull

o' the dancin' for the wimmin-folk. The brass be to come in i' the meadow, whilst the ladies be a-restin', an' a fannin' o' theersels i' the tent, as bein' amoosin' to 'em to hear it; an' that theer," said the old fellow, "be no more than roight."

"An' is the faggits all fetched for the hox?" said Jones.

"Ivery stick on 'em," said John, who, as being the oldest man present, and having a son in the village, and knowing, moreover, how things were managed on like occasions time back in that parish, was allowed to have a voice in it—"ivery stick; an' a prime baste he be too, as'll be a-cracklin' bootiful when they puts him down to do afore dayloight. I hopes they oona be too laate a loightin' on 'im hup," said John, "fur he'll taake a powerful lot o' doin', he ool. He be thick!"

"An' the donkeys? you said youn see to 'em, John," said Joe.

"So we han, me an' Tom, an' they be good uns. We'se got six on 'em. Three the gipsies lends us, one we took out i' the pound—the constable, Jacky Dodds, shut his eyes, an' he'll purten' not to know him agin when we raace him—an' two we got the offer on fro' some chaps up the river. We could ha' maaide 'em a dozen; but them theer chaps as has 'em a took 'em to the Waake up o' the hill, and is a gwain to run 'em agin to-morrer."

"Here, I knows to two ponies," said Tom Styles, "good uns, an' ef youn saay the word, I'll goo an' fetch 'em, me an' Barnes." So they jumped at it.

"An' the sheepwashin' chaps, be they a-comin'?" asked Joe.

"Is," said John, "they be; an' the haymakers an' the cherry-pickers, an' all on 'em; an' we'se got the garlands."

"Then who leads off," said Reuben, "you or Joe?"

"I defers to Joe," said John, "as I respecs him, an' he be the eldest on you, though I be his better i' aage. He taakes the widow Wamble—as be a merry un, though she be a old un,—an' I has Betsy Jones, as lost her husband o' the thatchin', through a-puttin' his off-side leg o' the wrong round o' the lather; an' though I says it, I dunna think youn bate us." And old John shuffled his legs about, as though he were already in the thick of it.

"An' the flags, an' the bushes, an' the benches for the

little uns to stan' on; an' the cheers, be them sin to?" said Joe.

"Everythin'," said John; "so don't you bother yourself, Joe."

"Then, maates all, I purpose we drinks John's good health—Styles, drink, and pass it roun—and ween all gie him a cheer," said Joe, "when we drunk it;" which they did, and stoutly; the old man in return saying what he had to say.

After which, as it was a hot night, it was proposed they should send a "depitashun" to the Grange, to beg the favour of "a gallon more cy-der." They came back with two, having probably asked for that much; so they were all very soon "comfortable;" and old Joe and Tom Styles and Cratchitt became volunteers for a song or two; for be it remembered the rector was away—for change and quiet, on account of illness—and there was no one there to remind them that the interior of a church tower was not exactly the place for secular songs.

"Now, Thomas Jones," said John, "when you can git your faace out o' that can, I'll jist thaank you to pass it. I'se dry; as dry as they be a-goin' a-Catterin, o' the twenty-fifth o' November."

"Why, you oud stupid," said Jones, "that be goin' a-Goodin."

"No, it bain't," said John; "that be o' Thomas's-daay, the twenty-fust o' December; now thin."

"Well, it be the saame, bain't it?" said Jones, "It be all opples an' cy-der."

"No, it bain't," said John; "the one's a ooman, an' the t'other's a mon; leastways a saynt. Theelt be a-sayin' as the 'oud ooman' as they had o' Twelfth-noight were a mon nixt!"

"What oud ooman?" said Jones. "Thee be quare, John; the drink's i' thee yud!"

"No, it inna," said John; "it'll stan' as much as yourn, can for can, now thin. But I forgot, you be a young un, Thomas Jones, a pup; you don't know nothin' o' parish matters. They was off afore you was borned.—I'll tell tha.

"'The oud oomou' were a pole, a big un, as me an' my feyther has maade maany a time, kivered wi' straw—the eldest mon had to maake her, an' feyther he were the

eldest—an' we stuck her i' the whate-fild, at the top, an' agin the aste wind. That's o' Twelfth-noight. Thomas Jones, be you a-listnin'?"

"Goo on," said Jones, moving his foot to show he was awake.

"Thin," continued John, "his eldest son, that were my biggest brother, Jim, as we berried two year come fruit-pickin', he had the tindin' o' the foires—twelve on 'em in a circle; an' then the mayster an' the missis an' the young ladies, an' all the kit on us, we did oursels—plum-cake an' cy-der, an' werry nice it were; an' we drank 'a good whate-year, an' good luck all roun'; and thin we all danced roun' 'the oud ooman' loike good uns. Them was merry times, them was, Thomas Jones. Whoy, I emembers the vines a-growin' i' the country," said John, trying to make his mark as an old one while he had the chance of it.

"Wheer?" said Jones, incredulous.

"Wheer?" said John. "Whoy, at 'Little Vines,' an' 'The Vineyards,' an' 'Vine Hill,' an' 'Great Viney,' to be sure; whoy's they called it else? They grow'd 'em theer, an' over the waater; an' it were a bad daay when they grubbed 'em up, as they now as to maake the woine o' cy-der an' sloes; as ma look well, but as bayn't the raal thing. Now I can tell tha another thing, Thomas Jones," said John; "you be a onderful mon for a bit o' bacca—p'raps you dunna think as they usen to grow it i' this very parish?"

"Oh, come now, John, don't you gie us too big a mouthful at onst," said Jones; "that be a-comin' it too strong, you know."

"Thin I can prove it," said John warmly; "fur it be down i' that oud tattered Bible o' ourn, wheer it says as how John—that were two or three Johns aff ma feyther—were killed o' a haccident on 'the bacca patch'; an' theer be a note below it as how all the patches roun' about was stocked up i' the next year; that were 1662, Thomas Jones, 'ecos I larnt the figures; an' it were three year arter the passin' o' the Hact; so now you has to buy it instead o' growin' it."

"Truth?" said Jones, hesitating as to believing it.

"Gospel," said John; "an' at any one o' them plaaces to this here daay I undertakes to find lots o' bacca-plants in harf a hour."

"I wish we had some on it here now," said Barnes, whose pipe was empty, and his paper too. "Hast thee gotten a bit, Reub?"

"Houd the hand," said Reub; "it be a bit o' good, lad."

"Push that can on, Joe," said Cratchitt, "an' pass it to the ringers; an' then ween ha' another song and ha' the peal."

"We ool, we ool," said Reuben.

"Whoy, I'se bate the bounds o' the 'gang daay,' afore Holy Thursday maany a toime," said John, conscious that he had the best of them; "an' knew a mon as paid 'king's duty'—that were a shillin', Thomas Jones—at his christnin'; so he were a old un, he were. He were werry civil to we," said John, "an' alleys sent us a simnel at Ayster; an' oncommon good they was too, an' as yaller as a buttercup. He were a shrewd oud mon an' a saafe un—ay, as saafe as Black Jack's cave i' the Red cliff; him as went up the rope loike a cat, an' thin draw'd it in arter him. They nivir catch'd him. It's o' the faace o' the cliff by Dyneley, an' looks to the waater."

"I dunna know it," said Jones.

"Thee knowst nothin'," said John; "thee wast borned too laate, Thomas Jones."

"Now then, mates, for the bells," said Reuben, rising. "Let's gie 'em a good un." And they did, till the old tower shook again.

CHAPTER XLI.

WEDDING BELLS—JANE CLARE AND KATE ARCHER.

AND the next morning all in Grantley village were up by daybreak; those who had to work putting their strength into it, to have done by eleven o'clock, in time to see the weddings; and those who could manage to make it a play-day, bustling about amongst the preparations for the feast, and the garlanding of the village.

The mowers in the meadows whetted their scythes with energy, and their measured "swish" as the long grass fell before them, and left bright green paths in the rows, sounded like the sweep of one man. There was

good work being done there, and quickly. The sheep-washers were busy also, with the sheep at the mill-race; and the speed with which they hooked them and washed them was like a prize-wash. The cherry-pickers were getting on famously, and so were the timber-haulers; for you could hear the sticks creak again, as the game horses struggled and tore at them up the steep bits in the dingles. All who were at work were pulling into it, for it was to be a great day in the village, and each one there wanted to help at it.

It was a lovely morning. The smoke went straight up, the fog was rising, and the pimpernels were open; so that there was every chance of a fine day. The dragon-flies, too, darted across the water, and so did the kingfishers; and the butterflies seemed even thus early to be more about than ever they were. The freshness in the air was delicious; and the wafts of hay and bean-blossom, and gorse and honeysuckles, were worth standing still to sniff at them.

The cloud-shadows waved on the wheat, and the uncut grasses rippled before the wind; the grasshoppers were as lively as crickets, and the titlarks and linnets were chirruping; the fish were about on the surface, and the water-rats were under the bulrushes; the yellow blooms of the flag-sedge were upright, and its leaves were all free of the flies; the robins were quiet, and the blackbirds sang loudly; the swallows flew high, and the ducks were quiet; and the rooks went steadily and straight for their feeding-grounds; the sheep and the cows were up and grazing; the hills looked distant and the sky high, and the thin bright blue was spreading through it. And as the old folks who were weatherwise saw these indications, they said, "Mind, now, it'll be a daay o' purpose;" and a glorious June day it did become.

The chief scene of action was in the long meadow near the church, for the hay was off it, and it was central for the villagers; and there, even at seven o'clock, was a crowd of youngsters, looking on at the ox roasting; every fresh crackling of sticks and flying up of sparks being the source of intense enjoyment to them. And the big tent was up for the dinner, and the long one for the tea-drinking, and the round one for the dancing; and there were flags on each of them.

And in the village there was a great sound of hammering, and a great rustling of boughs as the evergreens were hoisted ; and as for foxgloves and roses and yellow-broom and honeysuckles, that were being brought in from the woods to help out the garden-flowers, and the lilacs and laburnums—well, they were in heaps and bundles, for all hands were busy, and every child was made useful.

Such a wreathing, and such a garlanding, and such a flag-flapping, had not been seen in Grantley for many a day ! And when at last, towards ten o'clock, the band—"and a big drum too" came playing up the village, and gave them a tune or two before they turned into the Black Bull, to rest and recruit till they were wanted, the joy of the juveniles knew no bounds.

At length the time came for the mowers to give over ; the cherry-pickers had done picking, and the washers had taken the sheep home ; and the timber-haulers had unhooked and were on their way out of the wood ; and there ensued a general trending churchward, to be there in readiness for "the soight that would soon be sin."

Old John was there, of course, and so was Tom ; and Barnes, Styles, Jones, Cratchitt, and old Joe ; and Reuben was to the fore amongst the ringers. And not only were the villagers and their friends there, but the people round about there came in. Mrs. Birch and young Bella were there from Honeybrook, and so were Jane Styles and Theresa Simpson, and a lot of them—a cartload of them ; and the relieving-officer too, and his wife, who drove over in a gig.

There was old William, too, from Boscabel, Mann the keeper and Gill the keeper ; and old Yates the gardener, to whom Harry Wells gave a lift ; and poor Took, who was still "queer ;" and Hopcutt the cow-leech, and Miles and Mary Miles ; and Binns the basket-man, with his son who had the fingers off, and got a decent horse in consequence, "clubbed for" for the carrying—in short, almost everybody was there. It was a great gathering.

And as eleven o'clock came, the crowd about the church got greater, and all along the roads were people ; but the interest seemed to settle at the church, for there, on the horse-block, old John was perched, by the lich-gate, along with Thomas Jones and Joe the fiddler ; Bob Cratchitt on the top step, and Tom below him ; and they were looked up to as authorities.

"What time didst thee git home, John?" said Cratchitt, who had left early, with Barnes and Styles, as they wanted to be up at daybreak to fetch the ponies.

"I dunna know disakly," said John; "but it were arter twelve, I reckon, fur the nightingales were on hard, an' the glow-worms had shut. Theer warn't one green light out all the waay."

"Ah, pretty fellows you were!" said Bob; "whoy, you had another peal arter we left. We heerd it up i' the meadows."

"In coorse we had," said John; "an' one at dayloight. That were Reuben, that were; he odd ha' it, for 'We may as well be hung for a ship as a lamb,' said he; so he got the men together, an' rattled 'em; an' when the business is over—an' it'll soon be now—they means to goo at it like men, an' clang 'em a good un!"

"Well, single life for me," said Bob; "Marriage rides o' the saddle, but Repentance o' the crupper. I'll stick as I be. Just you twig our beadle! Why, Aaron," said Bob, calling to him, "thee struts like a crow i' the gutter;" and Aaron did not like it, because the lads and the women laughed. "Here be old Will fro' Boscabel," said Bob; "I votes we tan him. Well, William," said he, "what wast thee a-wranglin' about at the Bull that noight? Thee wast put about, wasn't tha? Thee alleys gets coxy o' the twenty-nointh!"

"Thin what did they go fur to pull my bit o' hoak out fur," said old Will; "an' goo a-saayin' as they didna know as how that darned oud Crummil were sich a bad un? An' what did they goo fur to sneer at King Charles fur? Dayn't he git up in a hoak, as I teld 'em all? In coorse he did," said Will.

"An' arn't I bin up in a hoak?" said Bob. "In coorse I has, an' ony isterday too, theer now—a-fastnin' the rope for the haulers."

"Is," said Will; but he were a-hidin'."

"Then more shaame for him," said Bob. "Whoy didna he come down, an' show hissself, loike a mon; an' invite 'em to jist come on, an' two at a toime ef they wished it?"

"Now I oona ha' anythin' said agin King Charles," said Will; who, as we have seen, was sore on that point.

"Here they be; here they be!" shouted young Dick

Tabberer the scout, who was up on the mound there, watching. But the tiptoes were useless; it was a dust on the road from sheep.

"Darn your body, Dick," said old Joe; "thee bist a bad un; that be the fifth or sixth toime theest frightened us!"

"What's thee got that bit o' feern i' thee mouth fur, Joe?" said Jones to the fiddler.

"It be meant fur a sort o' sly poke at Mayster John, you know," said Joe, chuckling, "ef he cotches soight o' ma. He axed her i' the feerns, you see, an' the t'other come an' cotched him!"

"No, he dayn't," said Tom Harris; "it were up i' the ood, a-pickin' primeroses; fur Nobbly Jim was theer settin' woires; that be how I knows; an' he had to crouch, an' he sid him an' heerd him; an' he heerd him offer hisself, an' saay, 'Here's a true-love!' maning hisself in coorse."

"Did he hear any kissin'?" said Polly Pitt, who was rather a fast young piece, and always spoke out.

"Well, he dayn't say petickler as to that," said Harris; "but one daay arter—that were when he were up theer agin o' the saame sort o' errand—he sis 'em agin, an' he thought as how theer were somebody a-lettin' off crackers i' the ood!"

"That were it," said Polly, diagnosing the sound at once; "he were a-kissin' of her! I know'd," said she, "Mr. John were too much o' the gentleman to be a-neglect-in' his duty, an' disappintin' the young lady, when he'd know she'd be a-hexpectin' on it. He's a thoughtful young man, I know, is Mr. John," said Polly, "though he never meddled o' me. It showed his broughtin's up, Tom," said she; "an' his manliness."

"Then if I cotch thee, Polly, some foine evenin', I shall know what suits tha—a bit o' kissin';" and Tom Harris laughed.

"None o' your imperance," said she; "I'm for your betters."

"An' that tall gentleman wi' the beard, fro' where the roses be, bain't he a nice un? He ha' drawed both my chilthren, an' tooked 'em lovely," said Mrs. Beaman.

"An' mine," "An' mine too," said Maria Mills and Ann Ward,

"An' bain't it koind on him, and Mr. John too, to think o' we wimmin; an' ackshally to ha' the thought to order a pinch o' 'green' i' the tay; so as to maake it taste like quality tay, and fancy oursels fur oonst. They be good, they be."

"An' arn't he—that be Mr. John," said Cratchitt—"guv the coal as well, an' drawed it fro' the blessed pits hisself, as is a-roastin' o' the hox? In coorse he ar, and guv the faggits."

"Very well, then," said old Joe; "respecs his due."

"Ay," said old John, "youn see. This'll be heered on in Lunnun, this ool, mark my words."

"Niver all that awaay sure-ly!" said Jones.

"It ool," said John. "Look at the quality as be a-comin', an' the gray osses, sixteen on 'em ackshally, two to a carriage—white grays too; an' postillions ooth cherry-coloured jackets, an' ooth black caps on, like Mr. John wears out a-untin'. Whatn you think o' that, now?" said John. "Sixteen!" said he, starting afresh, and wishing to pile it up if he could; "whoy, theer'll be twenty-four on 'em, I shouldna wonder, ef they hucks at the hills; as they moight, as they be steep uns. Think o' that now; sixteen osses, aight to each on 'em, an' maybe a dozen apiece! Ay," said old John, "ef them theer Lunnuners was ony worthy to see it, they ood open theer eyes, an' no mistaake. They dunna see a sixteen-gray oss double weddin' every daay, poor souls, they dunna."

"I should think not, indade!" said Joe. "Wheer be Lunnun, John?"

"Whoy, beyond Ooster," said John, who was always ready.

"An' they got the Sivern theer, an' be it as big as Ooster?" said Joe.

"Not loikely as we be a-gwain to let they ha' the Sivern fur theer bits o' boats! No, we keeps the Sivern," said John, "an' manes to; but as to bein' bigger nor Ooster, I conna saay petickler; p'raps it be—a bit; 'ecos, now I comes to think on it, the Queen ood come to Ooster to live theer if it wunna; but it conna be much."

"Well," said Cratchett, turning to the fiddler, "if it comes to osses, Joe"—for he felt rather strong on the point—"our young missis had two to her own cheek when her went off."

"Is," said John; "but one were Dobbin, as you hucked at the hills."

"Well, these be hired uns, bain't 'em?" said Bob triumphantly.

"In coorse they be," said John promptly; "d'ye think on a casion like this he oodna like to gin iverybody'a turn? In coorse he odd!"

"I wish youn drive these boys, Jœ," said Betsy Digg; "they be a-scroogin' horful! How be my ribbins, Jane; bin they straaight? It be all my work this marnin' to see as I be roight!"

"Oh, they'll do," said her daughter; "they be all roight, mother."

"Here you two butterwomen, I'll maake a road fur you," said Barnes. "Be quick, they be a-comin'. Tom says they be started fro' the Rosary, an' all be ready at the Graange. Here they be; here they be! I know'd when I sid the new parson they oodna be long. Git the roses ready! Wheer be the school-girls? Oh, I sis 'em," said Barnes. "Lord love 'em, they looks fit to ate, they be so pratty!"

"Steady," said Peter Pufton, "an' mind my corns; I oona hoot ef I can help it; but ef you treads hard I'm boun' to."

"Oh, how pratty them theer chilthren do look! Well, I niver!" said Mercy Gains. And amidst a general tip-toeing and edging forward, the wedding party came in sight; and when, preceded by the bridegrooms, they arrived at the church-gates, the "O's!" and the exclamations were general.

Now as it is seldom given to the male mind to be learned in the mysteries of fashion and female apparel, it will be better here therefore—to save the risk of ignominious blunders and the adverse comments of the ladies—to simply say—as there were so many to describe—that the respective dresses of brides and bridesmaids were in elegance all that good material and good taste could make them; that Charlie Burton was Johnson's "best man," and Harry Wells Archer's; and that Miss Archer and Miss Clare looked "lovely," and the six bridesmaids that each of them had "charming."

Such was the verdict of all who saw them; and as they came from the church, as Reuben and his mates clashed

the bells, the brides—Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Archer—looked, as they stepped over the roses between the two lines of school-children, who were in white dresses and rose sashes, very pretty and very happy.

The cheers of the crowd as they drove away must have been heard up in the woods; and the old shoes and slippers that were thrown after them would have filled a wheelbarrow.

It was indeed a great day for Grantley; and when all were seated in the big tent, to taste of the ox, that was cut up, and “done to a turn” too, the clatter of the cutlery was like a fight with the bayonets. It was a great success, and the tea, for that “pinch o’ green” won their hearts; and when they cleared out, and turned into the round tent as the band and the big drum “went it,” old Joe, fiddle in hand, came to the fore; and settling them in their places, stopped the band; and then, tuning up, led off with the Widow Wamble, she having hold of his skirts, as his hands had the fiddle; old John following with Betsy Jones.

The tunes that Joe played put life in the laziest; and if old John, with the Widow Jones, did not make much of the steps, it was evident from the way in which his legs struggled that his intentions were good.

They kept it up bravely, and the stars had gone in when they parted; for never were people happier than they were—every one of them; and they all said, “God bless Mr. John and Mr. Johnson, and the young ladies too.”

CHAPTER XLII.

FLORENCE MILLS—CHARLIE SINKS THE BACHELOR.

JUNE, sunny June, was gone; with all its scented swathes and countless flowers; its deep rich greenery and its flush of roses; its rippling wheat and chequered tints on clovers; its birds, its butterflies, its mass of life.

And July too; its dry hot days and all its dusty roads; its myriad flies and all its lowing cattle; its bright white glare and fields of scarlet poppies; its rumbling thunder and its welcome rain; its trying time to all dumb things

in fields. That month of sea-side longings with town-dwellers—Brighton and Hastings, Eastbourne and those places, where the wash of waves is such a welcome sound—was past and gone.

There is something very jolly in that wash of waves. The noise of the sea as it laps against the old piles, as you loll about the sands, listless with the heat; the sea itself, barred with its lines of purple and green and blue, broken by the white crests of the waves, as they come hurrying in one on another, to break upon the shore, and dash their foam high up on the shingle, giving you the spray in your face, and a welcome sprinkling all over you. And the smell of the sea too, half oyster, half sea-weed, that you taste as you sit there, and wait with parted lips to get mouthfuls of it.

And August too was over—that gladsome month of golden corn and soft white bending barley; of linking tendrils and of ripening fruit; of absent swallows and the sound of doves; of young gay goldfinches and gathering linnets; of birds in grain and pheasants in the woods, and snow-white lilies on the wind-stirred water.

Two months had passed since wedding bells rang out from Grantley tower; for gunshots now that sounded in the stubbles told that the sportsman's month had come—September, that rich-leaved month, when amber hops are falling for the kiln, and partridge-pies are “in,” and mushroom breakfasts; and nice ripe fruit, and nutting in the woods; when the lark, the thrush, and the blackbird too, are silent; and the blackcaps and the nightingales away; and the robins have the singing to themselves, and rooks come winging home at six o'clock.

The month of faded roses, frosted buds, of tinted stems and gossamer on hedges, and whitened lawns, and fog beside the river; of rich ripe blackberries and scarlet leaves; of walnuts, filberts, and of russet apples; and tall, gay hollyhocks, rose, black, and buff. The month when water feels cold in the morning, and fires at night look nice and comfortable; the month of drifting leaves and busy gardeners; and meadow-saffron, and red hips and berries; the month when “cribbing” takes place in the hop-yards, and girls and women laugh there merrily; just as they did when Burton, twelve months since, was cribbed and kissed that day he was with Archer.

Twelve months ago—a lot of merry bachelors, and now two married, and a third “quite ready;” for ten days hence is Burton’s wedding-day—a ten days’ grace for partridges and cubs. Then six weeks’ “honeymoon,” and home for hunting.

How soon the year works round! How soon it seems the woods are tinged again! Autumn once more—the cycle of the seasons!

For the long-stretching woods in the beautiful Teme valley were again yellowing; and they were preparing to put on all those rich tints that were then just showing themselves, when, twelve months ago, John Archer rode up to Royston Rookery on the brown horse, and Harry Wells put him through his paces at the brook, and predicted well of him—a prediction that was so amply fulfilled in the hunting season that was then at hand. And now the good brown horse was again there, for Archer was married, and still abroad with Johnson, his brother Benedict; so Wells was to have the horse and ride him until Archer returned home, which would not be until close to Christmas.

Florence having a long round of visits to pay before she became Mrs. Burton, Charlie was granted the ten days’ grace he asked for; “just”—as he said—“to knock a few birds over, you know, darling, and to have a gallop with the youngsters.”

At length the ten days’ grace he had was over, and Hill Coombe Church—where pretty Rose was married—was once more gay with garlands and with flowers, and ferns and evergreens, and well-dressed people, waiting the bride—the fair Miss Florence Mills.

And gay as the village looked when Rose was married, it was even now still gayer; for no expense had been spared by the Squire in aught that would contribute to the gladsome look of it, or to the enjoyment of the villagers. All friends were there; and the people from the neighbouring hamlets came trooping in to Hill Coombe, just as they did, two months and more ago, to Grantley; and clustered by the church as thick as bees. The clatter the native infantry made up those stone steps from the meadows sounded like young colts broke loose, and up under the old trees of the avenue they still kept coming.

It would be difficult to say which was liked the better by the villagers, Rose or Florence; but as the latter was the old Squire's niece, and the Squire was a man who had the good wishes of all round that quarter, as he also had of all those who knew him, every one was anxious "to show the young lady due respect;" and even the poorest amongst them contributed their pence to go to the main fund for twine and ribbons; and the way that village, from the Hall Lodge to the end of it, was linked and crossed, and hung with garlands, was a sight worth seeing.

Favoured by weather like when Rose was married—as also was the case with Kate and Jane—the morning sun shone bright upon the Hall, and lit her golden hair, as Florence dressed—in bridal white, to link at last with "Charlie"—as fair a bride as ever sun shone on.

And as eleven o'clock drew near, the long line of people began to sway, for it was close standing room, every inch of it; and it needed all the exertions of those in authority to keep a clear path for the wedding party, who, from the nearness of the Hall to the church, would of course walk; and all there were on the tiptoe with expectancy. Old Will from Boscabel was decidedly in the ascendant, and conspicuously so; for he had on his hat and coat as many oak-leaves and acorns as he could well stick there.

"Ah, Joe," said he to the fiddler, who was engaged for the dancing in the village, "ef ony King Charles could a-lived to ha' sin it, an' that oud Crummil had bin turfed astead."

"Now, Will," said Joe pleadingly, "do be rasonable! You oughter not, you know, on a casion like this."

"But this be the werry casion o' all," began Will.

"Look here," said Jones, "you two; ain't it a fittin' match?"

"In coorse it be, an' I'se foight the mon as denies it," said Will.

"That's right, old fellow," said Edward Baylis, "stick up for your meyster, Will. He be a good un!"

"As I were a-sayin', Eddutt," said Jones, "it be a fittin' match; for he's a good un across country, an' her is, ain't her? An' in coorse, ef they haves a family, as the Lord'll be sure to perwide 'em with, whoy, they'll be good

across country too, wunt 'em? Consickently ther'll be more osses kep, an' more men an' boys waanted to be about. So it be all a-encouragin' o' native industry," said Jones; "an' that be whoy I holds good ooth it. Whoy," said he, warming up, "ther'll be ponies bought at once, youn see, to be ready for 'em: an' they'll waant lookin' arter, wunt 'em? Very well, then; an' ar'n't I got two smart-lookin' lads as be a-comin' on, an' as con be p'raps took in o' the staables?"

"That's wheer it be, Jones!"

"Scuse me, you know, Eddutt, but ivery feyther's got his feelin's."

"In coorse he haves," said Joe, "an' I honours you fur it; gie us your fist, Jones; I got nevvies myself. Ween harve 'em, ween harve 'em. Theyn maake good grooms ache on 'em. Be he gwain to taake the yarriers?" said Joe.

"I dunna think he ool, till the oud Squoire doies; thin he ool, no doubt; an' maybe sooner, ef the gout stops him," said Will. "He oona car much about it, though, I'm a-thinkin', to hev to be alleys ooth them yarriers; though he ha' bin a-brakin' on hissself in a bit while he bin a-coortin'; an' I hanna heerd him call 'em 'plum-puddin' dogs' for a longful toime."

"In coorse not," said fiddler Joe; "he warn't agoin' to be spakin' disrespecful on 'em. He knows which waay his bread be buttered, he do."

"Well, I holds good o' the yarriers, I does," said Will, "tho' he be sich a moighty man o' the t'others. I loikes to see the yar, I does, git up o' the turmits, or the furrers, an' see her run; but darn me, if them theer fox-'ounds you con see much on, let alone the fox; they be off an' awaay i' no time; an' the young bloods ooth 'em, wi' their rampajus gallopin' an' scoutin' an' jumpin'!"

"Then agin," said Joe, "look what a lot on 'em theer be. Why, theer be the 'Ooster,' them racin' tearin' uns, as'll bate a good hos, an' gin him law, too; an' the 'Ledbury,' as ool pick up a scent as others ood run over. Whoy, to see them theer 'ounds bustle a fox out o' that theer Weyman's Ood, an' send him through Teme, an' up them Putford hills, it be a soight, that it be," said Joe. "Well, them hunts reg'lar, don't 'em? Then theer's the 'Ludler' 'ounds, as works the ind o' the valley, them be

good uns, too; an' the 'Allbrightuns,' as works the t'other soide, an' in coorse them be good, too, or whoy be they called all bright uns? That's wheer it be," said Joe; "theer be two packs reg'lar-like, an' two more 'oothin' asy distance; so they gits the pick o' four lots on 'em, to one o' yarriers."

"Is," said Jones, who had been an attentive listener; "it be rayther hard that, too, o' the yarriers."

"Ah," said old Will, knowingly, "youn see. It dunna matter whether he 'unts 'em or no, he'll be ooth 'em. Don't his young lady go ooth 'em, and wunt hur still go ooth 'em? In coorse hur ool, an' him ooth her. It ha' bin all fox-'ounds this turn; but when you hears on him agin, as you will do, an' afore long," said Will, "it'll p'raps be all yarriers. They'll hev their turn to be talk'd on, mind ef they dunna."

"Stop a bit, Will," said Joe; "I thinks they be a-comin'."

"William," said Mrs. Perkins, knowing he had the seeing to some of the arrangements, "ool the roast pork be done?"

"Is, it ool," said Will, "an' the sasenin', an' all the rest o' the mate."

"I'se glad o' that," said Priscilla; "fur I be mortal fond o' sasenin'. Oh, what a nice gentleman he be! I wish he could be married oonst a week fur a twelvemonth. Theer ood be some tuck-outs thin!"

"Back a bit, Prissy," said Will; "here they be! Stan' back, you lads!—Joe, hit him; he oova keep i' line. Steady, you wimmin! Now then," said Will, as the bridal party approached, "three cheers, an' good uns, my boys, fur young Mayster Charles an' the lady;" and three times three were given by all there, lustily.

And as Charlie, looking as saucy and handsome as ever, lifted his hat to the crowd, and passed in through the church-porch with his "best man," Warden, followed by Florence, who was on the arm of her uncle, they all thought how well matched they were; and the women said, "They were a handsome couple, that they were!"

Clash went the bells; and Florence Mills was Mrs. Burton; and in a little time Charlie, with Florence on his arm, and with her six bridesmaids, in cerise and white, trooping after them, passed along the flower-strewn paths,

and entered his future home, Peyton Hall, amidst the hearty cheers and good wishes of all those present.

The crowd then made the best of the way to the village, and were soon in the enjoyment of the good things provided for them; and the rest of the day was spent by them joyously; there being—thanks to the Squire—no lack of old country sports to be seen there. And in the afternoon, when Burton and his bride left for London, the shower of shoes that followed them was accompanied with each one's best wishes for their future happiness.

And thus, of the Bachelor friends that we met twelve months ago, three have become Benedicts: Burton of Boscabel, Johnson of the Rosary, and John Archer of Grantley Grange.

THE END

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